

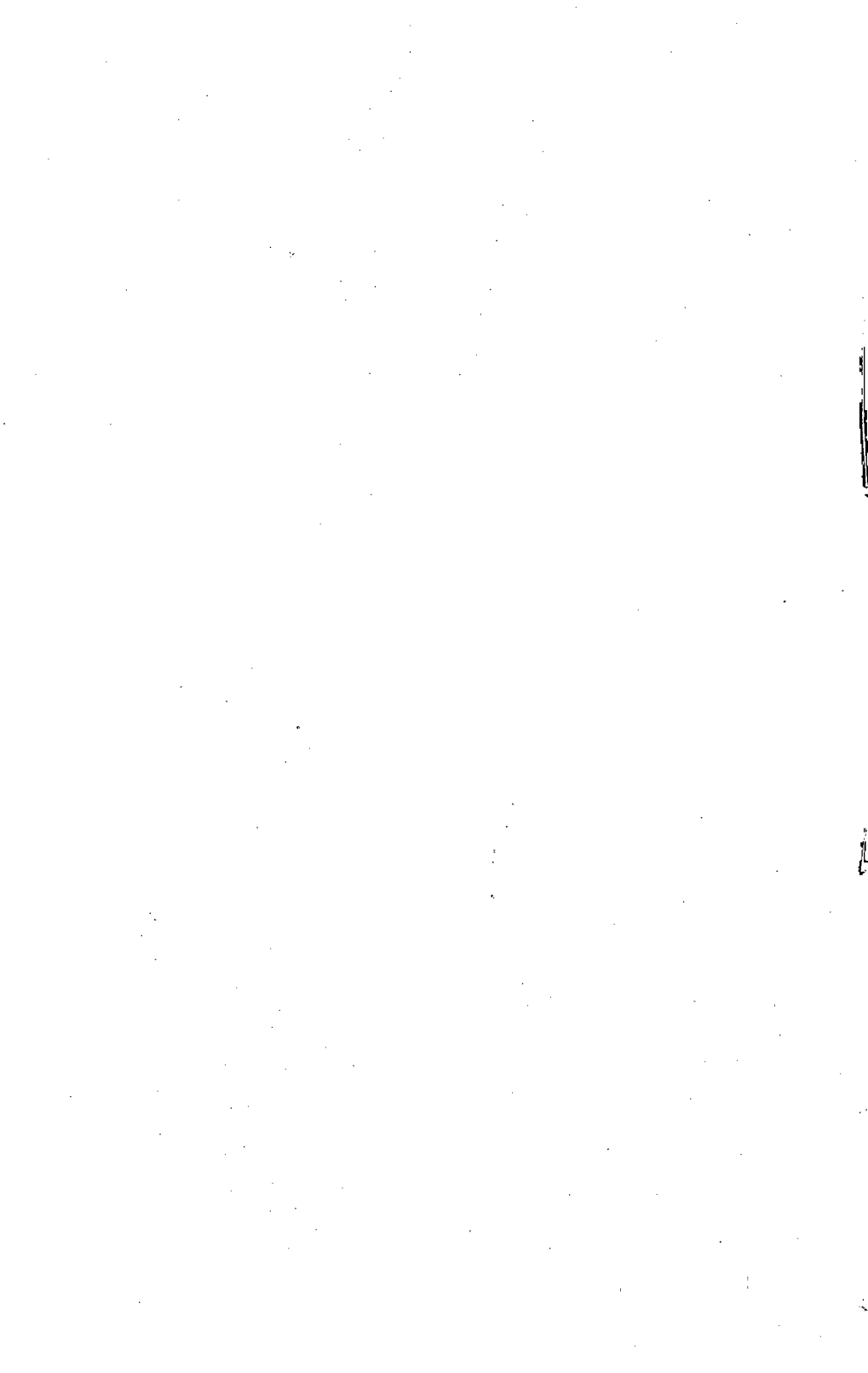
# TEACHINGS OF GURU NANAK DEV

*edited by*  
TARAN SINGH



PUNJABI UNIVERSITY BUREAU  
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

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PUBLICATION BUREAU  
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

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Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies,  
Punjabi University, Patiala

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## PREFACE

(First Edition)

Such a book which could tell about the basic teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, in precise, clear and unambiguous manner, was planned in 1969 A.D. as Guru Nanak's birth quincentennial volume under the inspiring and able guidance of the then Vice-Chancellor of the Punjabi University, S. Kirpal Singh Narang. A scholar was commissioned to produce the book. But something or the other intervened and time passed on. A review of the situation suggested the formation of a Committee of scholars including Bhai Jodh Singh and Dr. Balbir Singh to arrange for the book to come up. Belated appearance of the book has, I feel, been duly compensated by the valuableness of the articles of the scholarly contributors, later commissioned by the committee to write on various aspects of the Guru's teachings.

Guru Nanak Dev, according to the tradition of the *Janamsakhis* was proclaimed *Guru-Parmeshwara* by *Parbrahm Parmeshwara* Himself as he was taken to the Divine Court from the *Bein* rivulet. He was granted a cup of the Nectar of the Name and had the assurance that wherever his blessing would be showered the blessing of the Supreme would be there.

The Guru set out on his preaching mission with full authority.

The compare any two religions to draw that the one is higher or more perfect or better than the other is a perversion. It should at once be conceded that each religion has its own personality and is different from every other religion. Each religion stands in its own right even though it may appear that it has a few ideals, concepts, doctrines, dogmas, rituals and ways which are similar or common or identical with those of another religion. Some correspondence of ideas is always possible but no resemblance is enough to prove the 'influence' of the one upon the other. Even identity of some ideas in two scriptures connotes the similarity of the mystical experience of the two seers and not that the one has drawn upon the other.

The Religion that Guru Nanak Dev conceived and preached is different from any other religion. The ideals, concepts and doctrines to which he subscribed are contained in his *bani* (sacred composition) which, in its authentic form, has been preserved in the Guru Granth which was compiled and edited by Guru Arjun Dev (1563-1606). Guru Nanak Dev's spiritual successors, also known as the Gurus, interpreted, expounded, explained most faithfully the ideas 'broadcast' by the founder Guru as 'received' in the form of commands from the 'Highest', each in his own way and individual style. The Religion has had its historical evolution and development. Basically, however, the Religion of Sikhism is what Guru Nanak visualised.

All that Guru Nanak has to say proceeds from the '*Mul Mantra*' or the 'Basic Doctrine' which, as revealed to him, reads as *Ikonkar Sati Namu Kartā Purakhu Nirbhau Nirvairu Akāl Murti Ajūnī Saibhang Gur parsadi*. The seven facets of the Basic Doctrine include Guru Nanak Dev's metaphysics, philosophy, religion, social idealism, aesthetics, philosophy of political and individual freedom and values of religion and culture. The *Mul Mantra* comprises seven values. Absolute value is one and only one. But these seven facets of the same, as arranged by Guru Nanak, are no where else to be found in the same sequence, order and arrangement of emphasis. This arrangement of values proclaims the originality of the faith of the Guru. The contents of this book naturally veer round the subjects of the *Mul Mantra* or as they have been adumbrated and expounded in the rest of the revealed *bani*.

Our sincere thanks are due to all the scholars who have graciously contributed to this volume.

**TARAN SINGH**

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# INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AND GURU NANAK

*Bhai Jodh Singh*

Before we point out where Guru Nanak differed from the Indian philosophical and religious thought, it is necessary to understand the connotations of the two terms, philosophy and religion. In his introduction to *History of Philosophy : Eastern and Western*, sponsored by the Government of India and first published in 1952 by George Allen and Unwin Limited, London, the late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the then Minister of Education in the Central Government gives the meaning of the term philosophy by quoting a Persian poet as under :

*Mā zi Aghāz O zi Anjām-I-Jahan Bi-Khahar Im  
Awwal-O-Akhar-I-īn Kuhna Kitab ufiād Ast*

We are ignorant of the beginning and end of this universe. The first and the last pages of this old book have been lost.

"Ever since man attained consciousness he has been trying to recover these lost pages. Philosophy is the name of this quest and its results."

To define religion I may quote Professor Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. On page 22 of his book *Religion and Culture* he writes :

"The problem of religion arises from realisation of the imperfect condition of man. Life is not merely a physical phenomenon or a biological process. Who shall save me from the bond of this death, from the snares and dangers of this world? The need for redemption implies the presence of conditions and circumstances from which we seek escape or liberation... It is a life of realisation, *gnosis*, an inner intuitive vision of God, when man achieves absolute freedom and escapes from the blind servitude to ordinary experience. It is a subtle inter-wovenness with the realities of the spiritual world. It is not knowledge or the recognition of universal ideas, through a dialectical process or analysis of empirical data."

On page 23, he explains it further by saying that intuition is not emotion but the claim to certain knowledge. It gives us a sense of divine

reality as a thing immediately certain and directly known. The sense of God penetrates the seer's consciousness but it does not come like the light of day, something external, something out there in space. The barrier that separates the seer from the divine life is broken down. It is the aim of the seer to live in the light and inspiration of this experience, to be one with God in an abiding union.

Thus, we see that philosophy depends on the conclusion reached by human reason and thought but religious truth depends upon the intuitive experience of the individual, who reveals it to the world in human language as far as possible. But in India, religion and philosophy went hand in hand. All the six schools of Indian Philosophy discuss the existence of God, the creation of the universe, the nature of human soul, its redemption and how to achieve it. The testimony of the *r̥sis* (lit. seers) or the intuitive experience recorded in the *Ved mantras* and *Upanisads* was considered to be valid proof.

Guru Nanak was not a philosopher in the sense noted above. He was essentially a religious man and proclaimed to the world what he experienced in his own soul in as clear a language as possible. He agreed with the seers of the *Upanisads* who said, "nāy amatma parvacanena labhyo na medhaya na bahuna s'rutena" i.e. this self cannot be attained by instruction nor by intellectual power nor through much hearing. "Religion is not mere intellectual conformity or ceremonial piety. It is spiritual adventure, it is, not theology but actual practice."

Guru Nanak had this experience and came face to face with the Supreme Reality as has been recorded allegorically in his earliest biography, yet available. Bhai Gurdas, too, has given an account of it in his first Var. He has himself described it in Var Majh, pauri 24. The compiler of the *Puratan Janamsakhi* relates that when Guru Nanak was serving Daulat Khan Lodhi, the Governor of this territory at Sultanpur, as a store keeper, everyday, early in the morning he used to go for a bath in the stream called Bein. After the bath, he sat in contemplation on its bank till day-break. One day he entered the water for a bath as usual but did not come out for a long time. The servant who waited there with his clothes thought that he was drowned. He informed the sister of the Guru, Bibi Nanaki and other relatives of his and in due time the Nawab also came to know of it. The Nawab visited the place of occurrence with a number of divers who were ordered to

search for the body. Dragnets were also thrown in the river and the area was thoroughly combed but without success. Guru Nanak, says the biographer, was taken into God's presence and was given the ambrosial cup of the Name to drink and was commissioned to proclaim to the world the efficacy of the Name for salvation of their souls.

Bhai Gurdas's description runs as follows :

First the Baba found the door of His Grace and then worked hard (for His vision). He ate sand and akk pods and slept on a bed of gravel. He practised hard austerities and was very fortunate to get reconciled to God. He was honoured in the realm of Truth and got the priceless gift of the Name and humility. The Baba looked intently and saw the whole world afire without the Guru, there was darkness all around and the mankind groaned under its weight. He donned the garb of a preacher and started his itineraries. He resolved to reform the people.

In his own hymn in Var Majh the Guru puts down the details of this vision :

I was a minstrel jobless and He (God) put me to this work. Sing my praises day and night was the order from His presence.

The True Lord summoned the bard to His palace.

He got the robe of honour of singing His everlasting attributes, and was provided with the ambrosial food of the Name.


Those who fill themselves with this food under Guru's instruction obtain peace.

The minstrel proclaimed what (he was ordered) through the Word.

Those who praise the Truth meet the Perfect (Lord) Nanak.

In Rag Tilang he says, "I proclaim, O Lord, what the Master inspires me with."

The Vedas are the oldest treatise on the religion in India, may the whole world. A study of their hymns shows that the early r̥sis believed in Polytheism. They deified the forces of Nature and to propitiate them offered "favourite articles of food—milk, honey, melted butter, grains and their preparations, flesh and the stimulating juice of the plant Soma." Sacred fire was lit and oblations were ladled into it. The fire-good (Agni) was "asked to carry the oblations, committed to his care, to the gods or fetch the letter to receive them." By these sacrifices (yajnas) "they wanted to secure the goodwill of the gods, granting mundane happiness and a delectable heavenly life after death."<sup>3</sup>

Guru Nanak preached the worship of one God in truth and spirit. His *mul-mantra* or the basic creed which he gave to the Sikhs begins with the numeral. I, followed by  which is pronounced ik-oamkar. It means that the Supreme Reality designated by oamkar is one. In course of time a word may change its meaning, or it may be given a new interpretation, but a numeral has a fixed value for ever. The placing of numeral one before oamkar expressed the unity of God eternally. The unity of Godhead was the first article of his faith. "The whole visible creation is Thy body, whatever we hear is Thy voice. Thou Thyself pervadest all and art the enjoyer. O mother, how can I talk of another. My Lord is one. One, O brother, He is one. He himself showers His grace. Whatever He wills He does. Nothing can be done against His will. We describe Thee as Thou revealest to us. It is all Thy glory."<sup>4</sup>

The principal Vedic gods Pūsan, Viṣṇu, Indra. Rudra, Agni later on gave place to Brahma (the creator), Viṣṇu (the Preserver) and Siva (the destroyer). These three gods formed the Trinity, so to say, of the Hindu faith, when Guru Nanak was born. Numerous other gods and goodness were worshipped besides the three chief ones. Guru Nanak discarded the worship of the whole pantheon including Brahma, Viṣṇu and Siva. 'They were all creatures of the Supreme God' said he 'and are crying to Him for His grace'.

"Brahma, Viṣṇu and Siva stand at His door to serve the unfathomable and infinite Lord and many others who are beyond count are seen crying to Him."

14.2 (*Maru Solhe*).

All the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu and other gods and demons are His creation and will be honoured in his court when they act according to His will.

"His will created the ten incarnations, and innumerable number of gods and demons. He who obeys His will, will be robed in his court and him the Lord will cause to meet the Truth and get united with it."

12-16 (*Maru Solhe*).

Some Indian and foreign writers have stated that the idea of oneness of God preached by Guru Nanak was the outcome of the influence of Islamic teachings on him. But this appears to be a wrong notion. 'In India a belief in an infinite illimitable Supreme Power was

gradually evolved by seers and philosophers ages before the migration of Aryans to Europe. Prajapati, who was represented as the father of gods, gradually received exceptional human homage. There was also Aditi who appears under various guises, being in one passage of the Rig Veda identified with all the deities, with men with all that has been and shall be born and with air and heaven....'

But there appears again to have been a more exalted concept of a divinity who was inexpressible and who could only be described by a periphrasis. He was bright and beautiful and great. He was one, though the poets called Him by many names.

एकं सद विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति

Before there was anything, before there was death or immortality before there was distinction between day and night there was that one.<sup>5</sup>

So the idea of oneness of God was not new to Indian thought. But it appears that the religious leaders previous to Guru Nanak neglected to preach the spiritual realities to the masses, who remained sunk in superstition and material pursuits. Their religion became confused with caste distinctions and taboos about eating and drinking.<sup>6</sup> They continued to worship not only gods and goddesses but animals, serpents, trees, etc. God that a person worships places before him the highest ideals of life that he can think of. How can those persons combine for a collective endeavour whose ideals are different. Guru Nanak realised that it was this weakness in the Indian society that made them helpless before the onslaughts of foreign invaders from the North-West. By emphasising that there was one God eternal and perfect, Guru Nanak differed from Jains, Buddhists and Samkhyas. No school of Hindu philosophy believes that he is Karta Purkh in the sense the Guru put forward. The samkhya school denies His existence and teaches that Prakriti creates the universe and Purusa (the soul) is a mere witness. Patanjali does posit a God but he is not the creator of Purusas and Prakriti, the latter are coeval with Him. The Nayaya and Vaiseska schools consider God "as the first efficient cause of the world and not its material cause i.e. a sort of demiurge or an architect of the world. He is not limited by the world in so far as the world is related to Him as His body. He is also the Governor of the world, the impartial dispenser of the fruit of our actions and the supreme arbiter of our joys and sorrows."<sup>7</sup>

Jamini the author of Purav-Mimansa does not think that God is the dispenser of the fruit of our actions. He thinks that *Apurva*—the subtle potency of the act—itself produces the accomplishment of the fruit. Further, the Purav-Mimansa "believes that the universe has neither beginning nor end, it was and will be always as it is present. There is neither the creation nor the total destruction of the world. So God cannot be conceived as the cause of the universe."<sup>8</sup>

In *Uttar Mimamsa* as interpreted by Sankara "the Supreme *Brahman*, when viewed as the creator and governor of the universe is said to be *Saguna-Brahman* or the personal God. Both (*Nirguna and Saguna* are the valid forms of *Brahman*. *Saguna Brahman* or *Iswara* is the living God. The totality of all things that are".<sup>9</sup> To explain the creation of souls and physical world Sankara posits *Maya* an entity which he calls *sat-asat* (real unreal) and *anirvacniya* (indescribable). Guru Nanak on the other hand says, 'Hail to Thee, from whom sprang *Maya*, the Word and *Brahma*, besides all those eternal beings fir to be praised and whose hearts are ever full of joy."<sup>10</sup> "The Master has created the five elements Himself, the Master who has beautified the body of the Truth."<sup>11</sup> Nanak proclaim this doctrine that God is able to cause all things. Cause is under the jurisdiction of the Creator who upholds the creation through his power".<sup>12</sup> Guru Nanak differs from those thinkers, old and new, who think that the universe, inanimate and animate slowly evolved out of lifeless nebula. "The Supreme Lord is the king, who has created the whole universe. He perceives, understands and knows everything. He pervades inside and outside."<sup>13</sup>

God is birthless. This contradicts the doctrine of incarnation. "He has no father or mother. Thou art born of none unknowable, limitless, unfathomable, unascertainable by senses. He neither knows death nor is subject to the law of Karma. Not subject to birth or death, belonging to no caste, self-created. He is unattached and undeluded. I am a sacrifice to the Everlasting Truth, formless and featureless, traceable through the True Word. He has no father no mother, no son or relative. Devoid of lust he has no wife."<sup>14</sup>

How was the universe created ? To this question the Guru gives the following answer :

"He who has created the universe knows the how of it, none else can explain it."<sup>15</sup> "Thou alone knowest how didst Thou originate it, it is all Thy play."<sup>16</sup>

In pauri 21 of his Japu he says that the Pandits, Qazis and Yogis do not know when the universe came into existence and in the next pauri he avers that none knows its extent also. This world is not a dream nor as the Vigyan-Vadini (idealists) say that external objects are states of our consciousness. "Real are Thy systems. Real are Thy universes. Real are Thy worlds and created objects. Real are Thy thought and works. Real is Thy nature, everlasting King."<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes we come across hymns in the Holy Guru Granth which describe the world as 'a mountain of smoke', 'a dream' Such phrases are used to emphasise the law of change and decay that envelopes all worldly objects. The world is real but subject to constant change. Decay and death are inherent in it. In this sense, it is a passing show.

Purasas or souls are not coeval with God, they are His creation. "By His will souls come into existence and by his decree they are exalted!" God created man in His own image, says the Bible. That was not said of the body but of the soul which contains His light. "Light fills all souls and that light is He. Through His illumination all get illuminated."<sup>19</sup> God does not need the agency of angels to carry his commands to men: "He is the soul of all souls. He pervades all vessels,"<sup>20</sup> when the wall of egoism that separates an individual from the Light within is destroyed, His will is known and by acting according to it a man is redeemed.

Indian religious thinkers divided men in four varnas and prescribed different *dharma*s for them. Guru Nanak proclaimed "that there is only one way (dharma), let anyone practise truth. In every age perfection is attained by this teaching of the Guru that a Gurmukh (God-oriented man) will find the unknowable and Infinite when he fixed his attention on the everlasting word like a continuous flow."<sup>21</sup>

Guru Nanak does not divide men on the basis of their creeds, colour, race or country. For him men are of two kinds Gurmukhs (God-oriented) and Manmukh (self-oriented). The former have turned their faces towards God and work for the welfare of the whole mankind. The latter follow the whims of their own minds and practise deceit, tyranny, falsehood and selfishness to gain their worldly ends.

When this world was considered a creation of Prakriti or a play of Maya and to achieve salvation men were taught to free themselves from the snares of Maya or Prakriti, naturally those eager for spiritual



progress gave up worldly activity and resorted to forests or mountain caves. Guru Nanak taught that the created universe was the outcome of His *hukam* (will) and a man could progress spiritually even when engaged in worldly activities. "By contemplating truth light dawns, then amidst sensual pleasures one remains detached. Such is the greatness of the Guru that living with his wife and children one obtains salvation."<sup>22</sup>

He forbade his disciple to live on alms and urged them to earn their own living and shares those earnings with the needy. "He who eats what he earns by hard labour and shares his earnings with others will know the path." Nanak's<sup>23</sup> picture of an ideally religious person is sketched in those words :

Rare are such men in this world, whom after testing God hath gathered unto His treasury.

They have rid themselves of the bonds of caste and colour and given up greed and misery.

Imbued with the Name they have become sacred places full of purity having put an end to the dirt and misery of egoism.

Nanak washes the feet of such God-oriented saints in whose hearts in enshrined the true One.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of *Gurbani* as regards salvation is quite different from that of the six schools of Indian Philosophy. Salvation in Sikhism means union of the soul with the Supreme Reality from which it emanated and a state of eternal bliss. In Nyaya and Vaisesak systems it is stated that "with the attainment of liberation, the soul becomes free from its connection with the body and has no experience of pleasure and pain or consciousness of any kind."<sup>25</sup> Kapila the compiler of Samkhya aphorisms does not believe in the existence of God. Patanjali does posit a God, but He is not creator of Purusas (souls). The liberation conceived by these two Sastras is freedom from pain caused by the identification of Purusa with the body through *buddhi* and egoism. Jaimini makes no mention of God in his aphorisms. He admits the existence of a permanent soul which enjoys the fruits of Vedic karm-kamda in this life or in heaven after death. Sikhism does not teach like the Vedantists that the *jiva* (soul) becomes Brahman even after liberation. By using the metaphor of streams and rivers falling into the ocean Guru Nanak states that they become part of the ocean but do not know it extent.<sup>26</sup>

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22. *Dhanasari* 2.2.4.
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## GURU NANAK'S CONCEPTION OF DHARMA—PERCEPTION OF TRUTH

*Taran Singh*

(1) No two terms of two different religious traditions are exactly identical in all their connotations. This is much more true in case of different eastern and western religious traditions. *Brahman* and God, *Nirguna* and Transcendent, *Sarguna* and Immanent, *Isvara* and Creator, *Purakh* and Person, *Guru* and Master, *Avtara* and Prophet, *Atma* and Soul or Spirit, *Path* and Prayer, *Sadhana* and Worship, *Ardasa* and supplication, *Samadhi* and meditation, etc. are not synonymous or equivalents. If this is correct, then *Dharma* and Religion are also not identical terms. Religion as conceived by the Semitic prophet and theologians of the West mostly consists in some beliefs, practices, worship, and conduct of man on the moral and ethical planes while Dharma as conceived by the seers and gurus of India connotes spiritual and mystic experience, metaphysics and philosophy, man's duty to the individual, earthly and cosmic realities, his observance of the laws of the cosmic order, etc. Though religious practices, rituals and worship do form a part of it yet they occupy a secondary and in Guru Nanak's conception of Dharma no place. Guru Nanak use the term Dharma in different contexts with different meanings but it is evident that he is defining Dharma in conformity with the general Indian tradition. All conceptual terms referred to in the *bani* (composition, hymns) of Guru Nanak must be interpreted in relevance to the spirit of the Indian tradition as it has grown up through centuries, passing through so many denominations within that.

(2) Guru Nanak, in his *bānī*, has used the term dharma in the following meanings and contexts :

- (i) Duty—He who meditates deeply on the Name develops a relationship with duty' (*Japu*, XIV. 4.)
- (ii) 'Justice'—'Dharma considers all the good and bad deeds'

- (*Japu Sloke*). 'Nanak, having created man, He has set up Dharma as the Judge for their actions (*var Asa*, II.1.)
- (iii) 'Guide'—'In the age of Satya, contentment was the chariot and Dharma was the charioteer (driver or guide)'. (*Var Asa*, XIII. 1.3).
- (iv) 'Truth'—'Dharma is one and only one for all and it is the practice of truth' (*Basant*, p. 1188).
- (v) 'Strength'—'In the age of Treyta, one strength (pillar) of Dharma was done away with and it stood on three legs' (*Suhi*, p. 766).
- (vi) 'Ideal'—'There is to jnana without the guru and there is no dharma without the ideal (*dhyana*)', (Slokes) (p. 1412).
- (vii) 'Charity', 'alms-giving', 'noble acts', etc.

In the Indian tradition, Dharma has all these connotations. But all these contexts and meanings suggest only the various aspects of Guru Nanak's conception of Dharma. Giving the most comprehensive definition of Dharma, he has likened Dharma to the mythical bull of the Indian tradition which is supposed to support and carry the entire earth on its horns—'Dharma is the *dhaul* (bull) and is born of compassion (*daya*)' (*Japu XVI*). So, as suggested by Guru Nanak, Dharma is that behaviour or conduct of man which supports and sustains the total life—individual, earthly and cosmic—in all its aspects such as physical, moral, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and mystic. That is, like the Indian seers, he believes that the term dharma is derived from the root *dhri* which means to support something else. And thus dharma maintains balance, poise and order in the cosmic life. In the same place in the *Japu*, he says that whereas dharma is the offspring of compassion, it is concomitant with contentment and maintains 'sūta' or the cosmic order. "Sūta is the perfect position or order; it is perfect balance. Dharma keeps every thing in its position and engages it in its truthful duty by remaining contented with that and doing it as its role, dedicated action or contribution to the totality. Dedication and contribution are made through the temperament of *daya* or compassion; duty as, natural routine behaviour can be performed only in contentment and not in rivalry or jealousy. If Dharma is that behaviour which maintains balance or poise, it has to be concomitant with contentment

and compassion. According to the Indian thinkers, the bull of Dharma has the four legs of *sat* (truth), *santokh* (contentment), *daya* (compassion) and *such* (purity—and Guru Nanak accepts this).

(3) Guru Nanak, like other Indian thinkers, does not stop at this. He believes that Dharma itself is a means to the end which is one's identification with Truth or the Supreme Reality. In the same place in the *Japu*, he says that it must be understood that the Dharma can carry the immense load of myriads of earths, it is so powerful and one who understands and harnesses its power really gets identified with Truth by becoming completely pure and truthful—'*Jaiko bujai hovai sachiar*'. To be truthful and thus to get identified with Truth, the Supreme Reality, is the central theme of the *Japu*, and the way to attain this, as revealed there, is to behave and conduct ourselves according to the ordainer's order as has been set up by His will which is engraved in our being or consciousness—'*hukam razaī chalana, Nanak, likhia nāli*,' (*Japu-I*). Thus, Dharma is to act according to the order (law also) established by the Supreme Being by His will and not under any compulsion. Again, the sense of that cosmic order or the laws of that order, is engraved in our very being. Human conscience, if not injured beyond repair, at once pronounces the right and wrong of the act undertaken or about to be undertaken by man. That is observance of Dharma is obedience to the cosmic laws on the basis of which human legislations are enacted or should be enacted. So, the end that observance of Dharma has in view is achieving man's union with the Supreme Being—and this is spiritual or mystic experience, not mundane, but it keeps the mundane existence also in perfect balance and order. Man need behave as required by the ordainer's will. This is his duty and performance of duty is observance of Dharma. Dutifulness on the part of every one maintains the order.

(4) Guru Nanak's Dharma is a state of conscience, compassion, dedication, contentment, truthfulness, obedience, etc. which come of one's love for the Supreme Truth or Being who has set-up the cosmic order. However, in another way, we can understand his conception of Dharma by seeing what he excludes from Dharma. Professor Puran Singh, commenting on Guru Nanak's var *Asa*, has rightly observed that he had cast aside what, for centuries, had been miscalled Dharma. 'In the Var *Asa*' (*Asa-di-var*) says Puran Singh, 'what is miscalled

religion from time immemorial is cast aside. The scared thread folly is mercilessly exposed. The hypocritical readings of scriptures and the wearing of loose garments and the paintings of foreheads and the reservation of cooking squares, the wrong emphasis on a dietary and human secretions, theatricalities of devotion are thrown away for ever as unworthy of any serious notice as religion or as religious.' The Japu, The masterpiece of Guru Nanak, with which the Guru Granth opens, starts by distinguishing the Dharma from the 'not-dharma', pointing out that mere acts of intellect or knowledge, concentrative samadhis, acquisition of pelf and power, and hundreds of wisdom—do not lead to the realization of Truth which lies in the impulsive obedience to the order (*hukam*) and will (*raza*) of the Supreme Being (*such*). Man's Dharma is to identify one self completely with the Truth which is beyond and above the consideration of time and space or caste and creed.

Guru Nanak has absolutely put on premium on the so-called religious practices (*karam-dharam*) for the true Dharma is not attained through them. The hypocritical religious practices do not touch the hearts. The Guru has condemned them.

- (i) As the desires of mind bind so do the religious practices (*karam-dharam*) (*Sorath*, p. 635).
- (ii) Those who do not have love of truth in heart, live luxuriously and observe religious practices *karam-dharam*,) (*Maru*, p. 1023).

He, on the other hand, believes that abiding in the Name includes all the merits of religious practices (*karam-dharam*) of outward purifications, abstinences, repetitions, penances, holy baths, etc. (*Parbhati*, p. 1332). If one is saturated with the Name, he need not bother about (1) metaphysical and philosophical concepts, (2) mere intellectual or emotional beliefs, (3) outwardly prescribed codes of conducts<sup>4</sup>, superficially donned on garbs and symbols, (4) forced vows (*vratas*), (5) mere outward recitations of holy scriptures, (6) imitative visits to the so-called holy places, (7) acquisition of occult powers, called *ridhis* and *siddhis*.

(5) If according to Guru Nanak, Dharma is that which promotes and supports life, then two questions viz, what is life and what are the implications of the support for life', naturally arise. Guru Nanak had the cosmic and individual life in view, both cosmologically and

psychologically. His emphasis, however, has throughout been on the psychological life of an individual. He holds that the *Akal Purakh* (Timeless Being) creates the cosmic order but the man, in fact, lives in a world of *haumai* (ego) which he creates for himself. The cosmology of Guru Nanak's conception is immensely wide, skies (*akashas*) and under-worlds (*patalas*), having countless suns and moons which run the course of millions of *kosas* (*kosa*=1.5 miles). To him, the cosmic order in real (*sach*) not imaginary or illusion, vast, excites wonder (*vismad*), powerful (*Qudrat*) and runs its course in the fear (*Bhai*) of the Supreme Being (*vide var Asa*, II, III, IV). The life of an individual is of real significance to him as well to other fellow beings. That life is marred by the conflict between *haumai* (ego) and *hukam* (order) and the man fails to rise upto the level of the *sachiar* (truthful person). In the realm of truth (*sach khand*), the liberated ones stand and wait to carry out the orders of the Lord. They are possessed of such virtues as self-control, patience, intellect, knowledge, fear of the Supreme, self mortification and love (*Japu* 38). All actions of the *sachiar* (truthful one) promote and support the total life—individual, social and cosmic. A righteous act which is inspired by truthful intentions fashions the personality of the doer and gives him accomplishment—truth is the fashioner and moulder of personality (*Asa*, p. 349).

(6) In all his dialogues with the Brahminical orthodoxy, yogis, Islamic divines and the laity, Guru Nanak, ignoring their religious labels, emphasised the socio-ethical values of their religious symbols and practices or rituals. His overall interpretation in each case is almost similar and stresses the same type of socio-ethical personality. His interpretation of the Brahminical sacred thread as given in *Var Asa* (stanza xv. 1) is like this : '*dayā kapāh santokh sūtu jatu gandhī satu vatu, ehū janeu jia ka hāi ta pande ghatu*—make compassion the cotton, contentment the thread, continence the knots and truth the twists.' The sloke under reference emphasises the socio-ethical values of compassion, contentment, continence and truth and puts these in opposition to the vices of theft, adultery, falsehood, abuse or deceit. It is a complete pattern or way of life wherein compassion, contentment, continence and truth prevail and they can prevail only if vices of theft, adultery, falsehood, abuse and deceit are banished. Any one of these values is good enough to make life worth-living but all of them practised

in a society would transform the society into a kingdom of heaven. Similarly, he has woven a value-pattern round the symbols, ideals and institutions of yoga, particularly of the hath-yoga, in a *Japu* (stanza 28) as this '*mūndā santokh saram patu jholī, dhyān ki karhi bibhūti....*' There are four such stanzas in that composition. The pattern of socio-ethical values that arises out of them includes contentment, social consciousness, concentration, time-sense, continence, faith, fraternity, self-conquest, God-consciousness, true knowledge, compassion, spirituality, consciousness of the cosmic order and laws. The yogis, as known to Guru Nanak, were not householders and were positively opposed to the life of laity and society. Guru Nanak, addressing them, puts emphasis firstly, on social consciousness, fraternity, humanity, cosmic order and divine laws; secondly, on such values as contentment, continence and compassion, and thirdly, on concentration, self-conquest, God-consciousness and spirituality. This value-pattern has love of life as the base on which virtuous living grows. The Guru compared the ideal worldly life to a lotus in the pond which lives pure in the impurities of life. The value pattern which Guru Nanak wove round the '*salat*' (namaz or the five prayers) of the Muslims, is that of truth, honesty, charity, right intentions and praise of God. Interpreting the unbounded dynamism of Islam for life in terms of its ideals, institutions, codes and symbols, he said '*mihar masiti, sidaq musalā, haqu halalu Qurān....*' viz. mercy, faith, honest living, humility, noble deeds, truth and submission to His will be practised.

These value-patterns look similar, more or less, when viewed broadly, but they are not completely identical. The values stressed in each case are not exactly the same, the order in which they have been enlisted is different—and that makes all the difference in a pattern. This difference lends individuality to each religion or tradition, but Dharma remains the same. These values are the Dharma which supports and sustains life.

(7) Guru Nanak, in his entire composition, in general, and in the three vars (*Mājh, Āsā, Mālār*) in particular, has taken note of the various experiments into which man was led to grasp the real Dharma or Truth. Man wandered into various types of practices of renunciation, self-mortification, *hath-yogic* postures and exercises, *japas* (repetition of mantras), *tapas* (penances) recitations of the scriptures and other



religious books, giving of alms and charities, *yajnas* and sacrifices of various types, discarding of the body in *yajnas* fires or by being sawn alive or cut into pieces, observances of fasts, forced self-abnegation or self-denial, continuous roaming about the earth, pilgrimage baths performing of set daily routines and rituals, doing of prescribed ceremonies, etc., etc. Guru Nanak rejected all the extreme ways of the above practices and some of them totally. He did not hold that any of the above practices is essential for the life of true Dharma. He strictly rejected the practices of *hatha yoga*, sacrificing of the body, fasting, pilgrimages to the so-called holy places, routine rituals and ceremonies and modified the meaning and practice of other to give poise (*sehja*) to life. He advocated renunciation of desires while living in the world itself. He denounces the hypocritical reading of scriptures, but advocates their reading in order to live in accordance with their teachings. He prescribed the loving and devoted *japa* (repetition) of the Name only and thoroughly rejected the repetition of *mantras*. He recommended *bhakti* or *Nam-bhakti* only—meditation on the Name with concentration on the Supreme Reality. He advocated the path of *Surat-sabd*—concentrating on the Name '*Wahiguru*' (the Supreme consciousness) who is One—transcendent and immanent, truth, name, creator, all-pervading, fearless, without enmity, timeless, existence, unborn, self-existent, consciousness and grace. Any other practice according to Guru Nanak, generates and activities the ego ('*haumai*') while the practice of the Name banishes egoism and thus leads to the merger of the self with the cosmic-self, the Supreme Being. Practice of the Name, emphasised he, perfects the human personality psychologically and intellectually, and makes it the instrument of noble *karmas* of Dharma. He gives preponderance to *bhakti* but *jnana* and actions do have their due place in his system. In the *Japu*, tracing the psychological and spiritual regions of the human personality, he mentions the regions of dharma, *jnana*, actions (*saram*, toiling), grace and liberation in the region of truth. In the stanzas of 'hearing' of and 'meditating on the Name' (*sunan* and *manan*), he has referred to the various stages of the evolving personality. The highest stage is that of the *bhakta* of the Name who rises above all suffering because the Name banishes all sinning from him. The only religious practice he has recommended is '*amrit veila, sachā nāu, vadiaēi vicharuā*'—rise early in the morning, repeat the true Name,

and meditate on the greatness (of *Wahiguru*). That is the only practice or '*dharma-karma*' prescribed by him. The Guru's grace alone can give one the devotion to the Name. This devotion is accentuated by the company of holy men, saints or *sadhus* where praises of the Supreme Being are sung. Nam-bhakti, banishes human tendencies of sin, lust, greed, anger, pride and attachment.

(8) If Dharma promotes and sustains life, egoism, according to Guru Nanak, is the force that destroys and undermines life. Egoism stands in opposition to Dharma. Dharma is to '*walk in hukam and raza*' while egoism walks against any established order of nature, law of the society, to gain some advantage for one's petty self. It is selfish to the core. If a man, says Guru Nanak, is to observe the law, he will have to be above the egoistic tendencies—'*Nanak, hukamai jai bujhai tan haumai kahai na koi*'. All egoism is to be given up in order to live the life of Dharma—'*haumai bujhai tan dar sujhai*' viz. 'when egoism is banished then access to the door of the Supreme is secured'. (*var Āsā, VII*).

But, to get rid of one's ego is not so easy. All activities of man are motivated and vitiated by his ego. Guru Nanak says 'Under compulsions of ego, man gives and takes, earns and loses, speaks out truth or lies, discusses and observes good and evil, laughs and weeps, besmears himself in evil or washes himself of it, feels pride of his species and sex, acts in folly or wisdom—and thus ego chains him to coming and going or birth and death, and he fails to understand the path of liberation. It is due to his ego that man falls a prey to *māyā* and illusion. 'Ego is the real cause of transmigration which is indicative of imperfection' (*var Āsā, VII*), *Vār Āsā* analyses minutely man's egoism which works in his pride of religiosity, superiority complex of codes, garbs, rituals, castes, creeds, wealth, beauty, kingdom, scriptures, ceremonies, alms-giving knowledge, authority, etc. As any form of egoism is a sin against society, it is a-dharma or not-dharma.

Guru Nanak, however, holds that man can transcend ego. In stanza VII of the *var Āsā* he has arrayed 'service' against 'egoism'. If a man employs himself in the service of the man-kind, he destroys his egoism. Service of man is the service of the Supreme Being. To explain the term service, he reverts to the theme of *bhakti* which constitutes the required discipline for Dharma and socio-ethical theme which is the

expression of the life of Dharma. He proclaims that service is done by those who lead temperate lives, meditate on Him, refrain from evil, do good, practice humility, transcend the worldliness of *maya*, eat little, live in moderation and surrender in gratitude to the Supreme Will which bestows all gifts on man. Alleviation of pain is one aim of Dharma and its realization is possible through service which mitigates suffering of others.

(9) The *Japu* beings by defining the Absolute Reality as *Sach* (True Existence) which existed before the beginning of time and in all periods or counts of time after its beginning. All that is real, good, beautiful, just or perfect proceeds from the first existence. The *Japu* concludes with the description of the man who has ascended to the region of Truth. There he attains the state of bliss (*nihāl*). He is possessed of the *sabd* or the Name which is permeated by the nectar of virtues of continence, patience, disciplined intellect, vast knowledge fear of the Supreme, dedication to the ideal, and devoted love. The practice of the Name fills man with the virtues of divinity to which the Name refers and the devotee attains the status of *sachiar* (possessor of the characteristics of *sach* the Absolute) as 'one takes after the Ideal he adores' (*Gauri I*, 224)—that is Guru Nanak's dictum. Guru Nanak has not debated the problem of free-will and determinism. He, however, holds that the gift of the Name is a grace and the attainment of the state of '*sachiar*' is possible by grace only. The man who hears the *ṣabd* from the guru meditates over it and translates the teaching of the guru in his actions, is really blessed by the grace. Such a blessed man harmonises his freedom with the cosmic consciousness or will. Living in harmony with the cosmic consciousness is the Supreme Dharma.

Guru Nanak, in *var Āsā* (X), has laid down how a seeker can arrive at truth and live truthfully.

Truth is known then only when the True One is in the heart and when the filth of falsehood is scrubbed off and the body (mind) is washed clean.

Truth is known then only when one bears love for Truth and hearing the Name feels happy, he gets liberation (he is at the threshold of liberation).

Truth is known only then when one masters the art of life and having prepared the field of body (mind) sows the seed of the Name of

the creator.

Truth is known only then when one receives true instruction (from the guru), cultivates compassion for the living beings and gives in charity (some of his earnings).

Truth is known only then when one resides at the font of spirit and in the instruction of the guru attains peace.

Truth cures all maladies and washes out all the sins from the mind. Nanak, supplicates before those who have attained the Truth.

Love of the True One (Supreme Being), truth itself, art of living, right instruction and self-concentration (font of spirit) make one *sachiar* or truthful. The Supreme Being is all pervading and thus truth is inherent in man.

(10) Dharma of Guru Nanak's conception is not a matter of formal concepts, beliefs, worship and practices but a state of purity and strength of mind, born of the intense love of the Supreme Being 'Wahiguru' inculcated through constant devoted remembrance of the Name, and expressed in that natural behaviour of it which contributes to the total human life by promoting and sustaining it in truth, righteousness and justice and by giving it physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual poise. It is more concerned with life here and accepts that hereafter shall take care of itself if life here is lived truthfully in the love of the Supreme Truth. As the Supreme Being or Truth is inherent in man, living of Dharma comes to him naturally. All potentialities for life of Dharma are lying within man. They are only to unfold themselves. Practice of the Name starts and completes the process of unfoldment and evolution. Remembrance of the Name cultivates Dharma in man.

# THE IDEA OF THE SUPREME BEING (GOD) IN SIKHISM

*Gurbachan Singh Talib*

## SIKHISM A THEISTIC CREED

Sikhism is a Theistic religion, and totally rejects all reasoning which may attempt to prove that the universe is an automatic machine, or that it is a continuation of atoms which are self-created and self-perpetuating. According to the Sikh belief God is self-created and all that exists, has emanated from Him. As to any speculations about the origin of God or the creation of the universe by Him, no mythological or any other explanation is offered. Man's intellect cannot penetrate the Divine mystery, and hence all that man can attempt is to feel or realize the existence of God through intuition or spiritual experience, called *anubhava* in Indian philosophy. Logic or any other kind of reasoning cannot prove the existence of God, for against one kind of reasoning another can be advanced. Hence for man is to try to realize the existence of God in a spirit of humility, and to engage in prayer and devotion, so that he may become one with the Supreme Reality, that is God. Guru Nanak says in *Japuji* (Stanza 16) :

By One Word the whole vastness of the universe was created.  
Resulting in millions of streams of existence.

Again, in stanza 21 it is said :

The *Yogi* Knows not the day and date of creation.  
Nor any one the month and season.  
The creator of the universe alone knows this secret.

God is believed in Sikhism to be eternal—that is, He is without beginning and without end. All else that is visible, had a beginning and will end. Even the sun and the moon, the stars, the earth—all will end.

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*Note* : Page references are to *Shabadarth Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Renderings from Gurubani are by the present writer.

The gods, Brahman, Vishnu, Shiva, Indira—and all others are mortal. In other words, they are subject to the control of Time which marks their beginning, decline and end. God alone is Timeless (*Akal*). *Akal* is one of the key-concepts in Sikh spiritual thought. While this term is from the Sanskrit in its origin, consisting of 'a' (negative prefix) and *Kal* (time), the particular spiritual and philosophical signification which belongs to it in Sikh thought is unprecedented in Indian philosophy.

Sikhism is strictly monotheistic in its belief. This means that God is believed to be the one and sole Reality in the cosmos, and no god or goddess or power like Satan or Ahriman or any other has reality such as God's. God alone is worthy of worship, and the highest end of existence, that is *mukti* or liberation can come through Devotion to God alone. All other worship is false and a waste of the precious gift of the human life. Besides its monotheism, Sikhism also emphasizes another philosophical idea, which is known as monism. Monism is the belief that all that our senses apprehend is only appearance; that God is the sole Reality. Forms being subject to Time, shall pass away. God's Reality alone is eternal and abiding. Hence behind the shows of things the spiritual vision is always aware of the eternal Reality of God. According to this philosophy, the differences created by man's limited thinking which result in selfishness, egoism and hate are meaningless. Since nothing exists except God; the man of God sees in all beings the reality of God. A few texts from the holy Granth Sahib will illustrate this point :

That which is inside man, the same is outside him; nothing else exists;

By divine prompting look upon all existence as one and undifferentiated; the same light penetrates all existence.

(*Sorath M.I. II*—page 599).

The Divine (like the lotus) is in the water; yet untouched by it :

Its light penetrates this water entire;

None is near, and none far;

I find it ever near, and chant its praises.

Nothing else exists inside or outside (man);

All happens as He wills it;

Listen Bharthari : This is what Nanak says after contemplation.

(*Asa M.I. Ashpadiyan I*—page 411).

What should the *yogi* have to fear?

Trees, plants, and all that is inside and outside, is He Himself.

(*Gauri Ashtpadiyan M.I. 7—page 223*).

Differences are owing to man's ignorance of the Supreme Truth, and to the influence on him of *Maya* (illusion). Through prayer and devotion and Divine aid the illusion created by *Maya* is lifted, and then man views the Reality of the universe as one, leaving no scope for hatred, avarice or egoism.

### CONCEPTION OF THE SUPREME BEING

The conception of the Supreme Reality, i.e. God is fixed in *Mul Mantra* (The Basic creed) of the Sikh faith, which stands at the head of the Guru Granth Sahib and is considered to be the opening of the holy text of *Japuji*, *Mul Mantra* is chanted and written on all solemn occasions when Divine blessing is sought to be invoked in any undertaking. In its original form it reads :

*Ek Oankar, Sati-Nam, Karta-Purakh, Nirbhau, Nirvair, Akal Murati, Ajuni, Saibhang, Guru Prasadi.*

Translated into English, this means : The One Supreme Being; Eternal Holy Reality; The Creator; Without Fear; Without Rancour; Timeless Form; Unborn; Self-Existent; Realized Through Divine Grace.

The various elements in the above creed on careful study will yield the true significance of the Sikh belief and its idea of God. The first verse-phrase *Ek Oankar* contains two terms; *Ek* (One) and *Oankar* (The Supreme Being). *Oankar* comes from the Upanishad and is an extended form of *Om*, which is the holiest of all names of God. In the Guru Granth Sahib *Om* is also used—once by Guru Nanak and twice by Guru Arjan Dev. *Oankar* is the Eternal Reality, above gods and goddesses and is holy and self-existent. To it, in order to emphasise the idea of the sole Reality of God, Guru Nanak has added the numeral 1, which in several Indian languages is pronounced as *EK*. This *EK Oankar* is the transcendental, unattributed Absolute. In other words, it is that which is above all Existence, has no attributes, since these will limit its absoluteness and Eternity.

In *Sukhmani* (xxiii-6) it is said :

Whenever He wills, He creates the vast universe;  
As He wills He is again *EK Oankar*.

*EK Oankar* here as elsewhere implies that Reality which is above and beyond all other existence.

The next phrase, *Sati Nam* contains two terms. *Sati* (*Satya*) is both Real and Holy. *Nam* is a spiritual idea, which stands for the Essence, the Absolute Reality. It is not merely the name as is commonly believed, but that for which the name of God stands, that is, the Divine Essence.

*Karta Purakh* : *Karta is Kartar* (Creator). The universe is fashioned by God and not by any deity. He is the *Kartar*, which is one of the commonly emphasised terms for God in Sikh belief. *Purakh* is the same *Purusha* (Male, the Mighty Eternal Creator). *Purusha* has come from the Rig Veda into Indian philosophy, and is one of the holiest words, as implying the Eternal Creator.

*Nirbhau* (without fear) and *Nirvair* (without rancour) are two negative attributes, implying God's absoluteness. Not being subject to any other being, and not being subject to need. He is fearless. Since He is the creator of all existence, He is without hate. He is all love, all benevolence. Hence in Sikh teaching, God is referred to again and again as father, implying His love and care for all creation.

*Akal*, as said earlier, is Timeless, Eternal. This term is characteristically Sikh. In numerous Sikh phrases this term occurs. *Akal* is an unmistakably the Sikh name for God, as *Allah* in the Muslim tradition.

*Ajuni* implies that God is not subject to birth and death. Hence the Incarnations of God who are worshipped in various religions in India and outside, are not God, for God is unborn. He is not subject to the physical process of having a father and a mother. Related to this is *Saibhang*. This is a popular form of Sanskrit *Swyambhu* (Self-Existent).

The last phrase, *Guru-Prasadi* implies that God's knowledge or realization can come to man neither through reasoning or learning nor through ritual performances like pilgrimages, fasting and keeping sacred days. None of the attempts in the ritual practice of religion will help His realization. Through devotion and prayer God's grace (kindness, mercy) may be aroused and through that alone may He be realized. This is the great mystery of mysteries, which no man can understand. Grace comes mysteriously and in ways unexpected. Only prayer and devotion from the depth of the heart may draw it on man. For grace



(*prasad*) other terms employed by the holy Gurus are *mehar* (love), *karam* (bounty), *nadar* (glance of compassion), *daya* (compassion), *kirpa* (kindness). So, this last phrase is essential in the enunciation of the basic idea of the Sikh faith.

### God Without Form

In the teaching of Sikhism God is conceived as being without form (*nirankar/nirakar*). In accordance with this faith, Guru Nanak is known as *Nirankari* (Believer in the Formless). No image or idol or any figurine can represent God, or be worshipped as God. All existence is God's visible form, but no part of it is a substitute for God. God is also *nirguna* (unattributed) as said earlier. This means that He is not subject to the 'three qualities' or ignorance (*tamas*), passion (*rajas*), and reasoning intellect (*sattva*) as is all creation or *Maya* in the different stages of its evolution. God is eternally perfect. Man's ideal must also be to rise above the three qualities of *Maya* and enter into the divine state of attributelessness through prayer and devotion. In the state of devotion or *bhakti*, God is also believed to have certain noble qualities, such as love, compassion, fatherly concern for all creation and the upholding of the moral law in universe. It is through such qualities that He comes close to humanity and becomes 'the Beloved of His devotees' (*Bhakta-vatsala*). To love He yields, but no other persuasion.

Man loves Him for the principle of Goodness and Righteousness that is in Him. He is mighty and is constantly intervening in the concerns of the universe by destroying evil. Thus arrogant tyrants such as *Ravana*, *Duryodhana* and certain demons in Indian religious history, are destroyed by God's might operating through certain God-inspired heroes. This belief is also shared by certain other great religions. So, God must be understood to be full of universal love, but also that Might which destroys evil and tyranny. The moral law cannot be defied by man with impunity. Guru Nanak in the hymns on Babar's invasion points out how the rulers were humiliated at the hands of Babar's soldiery, which became the instrument of divine justice.

In expressing the idea of God, Guru Nanak and his successors in the holy office of Guruship have employed some other terms which stand for the Absolute Reality. The most commonly used in this respect is *Brahm*. To give further emphasis to the idea of His transcendental character, this name is used as *Par-Brahm* (the *Brahm* beyond human

thought). *Guru* is made to signify the human Preceptor as well as God, from whom all enlightenment and realization proceeds. *Guru* is also used in the extended compound form as *Gurudev*—the Lord Enlightened. *Satguru* (the holy master) is another term used for God. *Thakur*, *Sahib*, *Swami* (all three mean lord, master) are frequently used. From the current Indian phraseology *Parmeshwar* (the Supreme Lord) is taken. *Prabhu* (Lord) always stands for God. Often the epithet *Sacha* (true, holy, eternal) is used as a noun substantive to designate God. *Pritam* (Beloved), *Piyara* (Loved One) frequently occur in *Gurubani* as substantives to designate the idea of God.

### **Names of the Supreme Being**

Besides the above names, and several more of the same character, which express the idea absolutely of God, there are names derived from the Indian mythology. These names are adopted, as they were current among the people and had become synonymous with God in common speech. Thus, *Rama* which is the name of hero-prince in *Ramayana* had become for the Indian people the most popular term for God. The Gurus also adopted this term. *Rama-Nam* means literally God's name and implies devotion, prayer, meditation. No other mythological name has the same popularity, force and unqualified appeal as *Rama*. Guru Nanak says about the devotees of God :

They neither die nor fall into illusion,

In whose soul God abides.

(*Japuji*—Stanza 37)

In these lines '*Rama*' is used to designate God.

Great vogue was acquired by names which express the idea of *Krishna* or *Vishnu*. That is because *Krishna* was a popular deity, and in the common mind stood as an incarnation of God Himself. So many attributive names of *Krishna* are current out of which quite a few are also employed by the Gurus. In each case however, these words purport to refer not to the god *Krishna* who is believed to be an avatar or incarnation of *Vishnu*, but the Creator, the eternal object of worship and prayer. Some names expressive of *Krishna* picked up from *Gurubani* are these : *Gopal* (Cowherd), *Mohan* (Charmer), *Murari* (slayer of the demon Mura), *Madhusudan* (destroyer of Madhu), *Damodar* (one with a string round the belly), *Banwari* (wanderer in the forest) and such other. The names expressive of *Vishnu* are these : *Srirang*, *Sridhar*, *Narayana*, *Jagan-nath*, *Govind Keshva*, *Madho*,

*Pitambar*. Some names are taken from the tradition of Yoga, which had been a popular creed in Guru Nanak's time among the people. The *Yogis* had such names to designate God, as *Alakh* (inaccessible), *Niranjan* (immaculate), *Gorakhnath* (protector of the earth). Other names are built on the 'qualities' of God with which the human imagination and faith has invested Him. To such attributes and qualities no limit may be set, as these proceed from individual experience and imagination. A few such 'attributive' names are : *Din-Dayal* (cherisher of the humble), *Kripamidhi*, (treasure of grace), *Data*, *Datar* (both stand for bestower), *Kirpal* (full of grace), *Bhagat Vachhal*=*Bhakt-vatsala* (beloved of devotees), *Patit-Punit* (uplifter of the fallen), *Sajan* (friend), *Saring-Pani* (holding the earth in His hand) and many others. Some attributive names are taken from the Muslim tradition, as these too were by then current. One important reason for the use of such names was to inculcate the idea of tolerance towards the Muslims, between whom and the Hindus there were feelings of estrangement. Besides the characteristic Muslim names of God—*Allah* and *Khuda*—there are attributive names from the Persian and Arabic. *Parvardagar* (provider), *Pak* (holy), *Miharvan* (compassionate), *Patishah* (king) are Persian. *Mir* (lord), *Khasam* (implied meaning, master), *Rahim* (merciful), *Karim* (compassionate), *Kadir* (mighty) are Arabic. All such names from the different categories mentioned above are employed without any prejudice by the Gurus, to express the idea of God.

### DEVOTION—SAHJ-BHAKTI

Devotion to God in Sikhism is centred in two main kinds of spiritual action—*Sahj* and *Bhakti*. Both these lines of action exclude reliance on ritual performance, of whatever creed, and on the 'unnatural' practices as prescribed by the monastic orders of *Yogic* system of *Hatha* (forcible effort to subdue ego). Equally forbidden is the practice of the creed called *Saktism*, which involved animal and even human sacrifices, rituals to raise the spirits to acquire supernatural powers and indulgence in certain immoral acts with a view to arousing the hidden powers of the self. In *Gurubani* a firm attitude of forbidding such practices as just mentioned is maintained, and man is warned that indulgence in these is not the way to find union with God or to gain liberation (*mukti*). Leaving house and home, wandering in waste places, living on begging, smearing the body with ashes, living without the ordinary decencies of

bath and bodily cleanliness—all of which are looked upon as holy acts in India—are castigated in the teaching of the Gurus. The seeker after God is exhorted to live amidst the tasks and duties of the world, in the midst of human society and to fulfil in a spirit of dedication to God the duties of a good and useful life. Guru Nanak, when he met the *Siddha Yogis* in the Himalayas, upbraided them for their forsaking the scene of the life of the common folk, who remain stuck up in their sins and suffering. Said the Guru to them : 'You holy men hide yourself on mountains; who will then bring liberation to mankind ?'<sup>1</sup>

*Hatha-Yoga* consists in the effort to arouse the secret power of *Kundalini*, a serpent-like passage believed to lie at the lower end of the vertebrate column. When aroused, the *Kundalini* is believed to give to man a superhuman joy, immense powers and union with God. This pursuit the Gurus looked upon as an illusion for the moral and spiritual life, and therefore forbade it.

All joy, all power, all Enlightenment according to them, comes from sincere devotion to God. As for Shaktism, it was a vastly prevalent creed in many parts of India. Its practices were dark and unholy, involving bloodshed, commerce with evil spirits and immoral acts. Another current religious belief which the Gurus discouraged was reliance on ritual, such as caste symbols with the sacred thread and the paste-mark, worship of *tulsi* beads and the stone *shaligram*, bathing at *tirthas* (river-banks and tanks considered sacred) and charity on special occasions to Brahmins out of earnings which might not be acquired by honest means. All these methods, the Guru said, are of no avail in pleasing God or entering into the highest state called *Mukti*. Better give up such barren practices which are compared to scattering seed in alkaline soil. No good will come of such efforts, however persistently made. Bathing at *tirthas* without true devotion to God is like 'washing jars from outside, which are full of poison'.<sup>2</sup> Or, ritual practice without sincere devotion of the heart is 'like putting a snake in a basket'.<sup>3</sup> This will not take away its venom. In the same way, any artificial methods will not make the impure heart pure. This teaching, coming from Guru Nanak, applies to the ritual of all creeds. A true *yogi* is not one who wanders in waste places or lives in cremation yards. Long matted hair, unpared nails on the hands, the staff and the begging bowl do not make a *yogi*. The true *yogi* is one who lives amidst the impurities of the

world as the lotus in water, without getting wet; or the duck without letting water fall on its wings. 'To live pure amidst the impurity of *Maya* is true *yoga* practice', declared Guru Nanak.

(*Suhi* M.I. 1—page 730).

The above exposition will give some idea of the spiritual path as indicated in Sikhism. God is approached as said earlier by the two means of *Sahj* and *Bhakti*. *Sahj* (lit. that which is born with man, or the natural way) is the path of prayer and meditation, rising to complete absorption in God. The steps of this path are outlined in *Japuji* as *Suniyai* (Attentive study of holy teaching), *Mannai* (deep pondering over it and faith in it) and *Dhyana* (meditation). From this, if man is fortunate, he may rise into the highest state of *Samadhi* (absorption in God). This last state however, does not involve death or complete negation of the personality of man. Man while absorbed in God must also share in alleviating the sufferings of his fellow-beings. While he himself would be a 'liberated being while alive' (*Jivan mukta*) his example and influence would bring 'many others to the same state.'

(*Japuji Sloka*).

*Bhakti* or loving Devotion to God comes from realizing Him as a being with loveable qualities, which the seeker must love and try to create within himself. In this, prayer should be accompanied by love of God. This love is not that of any pictured deity or of any living being however holy, but of the Formless God (*Nirakar/Nirankar*). It involves seeing Him everywhere and in all objects; loving all and bearing hate towards none. It is this conception of love which in the high teaching of Sikhism is to the seeker.

The seeker views himself in the character of a loving wife, patiently waiting for union with her Lord who is absent from home. This is a long wait, and all through the seeker-female must bear thoughts of her absent Lord in her heart. In this pursuit years pass, seasons come and go. Ultimately by Divine Grace the union comes about. The imagery of *Bhakti* is the same as that of mundane love, though inner meaning is spiritual and not physical. In a considerable portion of Gurubani one encounters the expression of *Bhakti*. The greatest example of such poetry may be seen in the song of the seasons entitled *Bara-Maha* in the measure *Taukhari*, composed by Guru Nanak. In that great song the seeking soul pines away in sorrow of separation, as the months roll by,

bringing heat, rain and the cold of winter. Ultimately when spring comes, along with that the joy of union also comes. So, God as Beloved is one of the important modes of conceiving Him, and this mode is of great significance in the spiritual poetry of the Sikh faith.

Before closing, it may be pointed out that an important form of devotion to God is *Kirtan*. This means singing with or without instrumental music, the holy hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib. *Kirtan* is performed in all Sikh temples (*Gurudwaras*) or any other place where religious-minded persons may gather for prayer. It is performed either by accomplished musicians and listened to by the assembled congregation, or is performed by the whole assembly chanting together. *Kirtan* is believed to purify by heart and to unite man to God through the relationship of love and devotion.

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1. *Bhai Gurdas*, Var 1.
2. *Var Suhi*, M. 3, p. 789.
3. *Maru Ashtpadiyan*, M. 1.4. p. 1009.

# GURU NANAK'S CONCEPTION OF HAUMAI (EGO)

Taran Singh

## I

The term '*haumai*' is a compound of two pronouns '*hau*' and '*mai*', each meaning 'I', and thus, '*haumai*' means 'I, I'. The ancient Indian term, for '*haumai*' has been '*aham-kāra*'—'I-maker' or 'I-doer'. In the *Chhāndogya Upaniṣad*, it (*aham-kāra*) is equated with *ātman* or soul, conceived as the immanent Divinity. But, its most popular sense, later, was the one attached to it in the *Sāṅkhya* philosophy viz. it is a mental organ or function, evolved from matter, and mediating between the material and the spiritual. In Buddhism, it has two slightly varying meanings viz. 'mind involved in I-making-mine-making conceit' and 'the bias of I-making-mine-making conceit'. It is from the '*aham-kāra*' that all actions spring. According to the Pāli Pitakas, springs of action are six, three being roots of good, three of bad actions or three of moral and three of immoral. The three roots of bad actions are greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*) and want of intelligence (*moha*); the other three are their opposites—detachment, love and intelligence. Modern *Māhāyānists* hold that in the *Bodhisattva* theory, altruism as opposed to egoism takes a more prominent position, and the goal of *nirvāṇa* is not one of personal salvation but of transferred merit, saintly aspiration being for the salvation of all beings.

## II

In English, word nearest to '*haumai*' is ego which, metaphysically, from the Latin root, means 'a conscious thinking subject' as opposed to 'non-ego' or object—thus, it stands for the 'self', soul or spirit. The term 'egoism', ethically, stands for the theory which holds the self-interest to be the foundation of morality, and the egoist, thus, is systematically selfish and self-opinionated. An egocentric is, as we call it, self-centred. An egoist can think of nothing else, but of 'I' and 'me', and is invariably

'talking about himself', in 'self-conceit' and 'selfishness'. Duality too has been recognized in the ego, and thus, ego is subject-consciousness and object consciousness, or, of 'I' and 'Me'—it is not dualism of essentially different substances, but it is of such a nature as to form together one individual conscious being. Again, a distinction has been drawn between Theoretical egoism or the Subjective Idealism which maintains that one's own individual ego is the only being that a man can logically assert to exist; and the Practical egoism which has three forms—logical, aesthetic and moral, according to Kant. A logical egoist considers it unnecessary to bring his own judgement to the test of another's understanding; the aesthetic egoist is fully satisfied with his own tastes; and the moral egoist makes himself the end of all his activities—nothing is valuable unless it benefits him. In ethics, egoism maintains that the standard of conduct for the individual is his own good on the whole. So, the inclinations and purposes of an egoist are immediately and exclusively directed towards himself; he, in his consciousness, thinks about himself and his own immediate interest only, is self-centred, and self-opinionated.

Egoism is based on an atomistic conception of society viz every social whole is composed of individuals, the nature of each one of whom is to preserve his own life, to seek his own good, to satisfy his own desires; and good and evil are relative to the individual. But it is a false conception, as no man is self-contained. An individual's interests are not different from the interests of the society or of all members of the community. Every individual is a member of an organic whole and the complete good is the good of the whole of which he is a member. Higher men realize their true good by denying what appears to be their private good, and they so far identify themselves with their state or church that they are content to die so that the institution may live. Self-interest, self-conceit, self-seeking and self-reference—all become irrelevant to them.

### III

Using the term '*haumai*' viz I-ness and My-ness, Guru Nanak has given his view of '*haumai*' most comprehensively in sloke VII.1 of the *Asa-di-var* (Ode in the Asa Measure). At the same place, in another sloke, his first successor, Guru Angad, has also tried to interpret the view of Guru Nanak on the subject. Guru Nanak's sloke, referred to in



the above, reads, in English translation, as this :

In ego man comes, in ego he goes,  
 In ego he is born, in ego he dies.  
 In ego he gives, in ego he receives,  
 In ego he earns, in ego he loses.  
 In ego he is true or false,  
 In ego he has considerations of sin and virtue.  
 In ego he descends to hell or rises to heaven,  
 In ego he laughs, in ego he weeps.  
 In ego he begrimes, in ego he washes himself,  
 In ego he is misled into the considerations of castes and kinds.  
 In ego he is foolish, in ego he is wise,  
 And loses, all sense of salvation and liberation.  
 In ego he is absorbed in *Maya* (illusion), in ego he is overtaken  
 by delusion.  
 In ego are men born as creatures.  
 Man can see the Gate, if he understands his ego,  
 Without realization, all talk of ego that entangles a man.  
 Nanak, under the Supreme Will our record is made.  
 As one sees the one, we perceive the other.

(*Asa-di-var* VII. 1)

In the light of the above *sloke*, Guru Nanak's view of '*haumai*' can be constructed as this :

1. '*Haumai*' is a creation of the Supreme Being as it comes into existence under His Will. He is the master of the play of life. The whole play of life is caused by the presence of ego in man which gives rise to the conflict between the higher and lower selves.
2. '*Haumai*' is a condition of the mind. Mind itself is born of the five elements which are the objects of the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. That is, '*Haumai*' is material and not spiritual in its basic nature.
3. *Haumai* (I-ness, My-ness) is so powerful an instinct that it influences each and every activity of man (or animal) throughout the course of his existence which may run into myriads or births and lives. Ego is the basis of his transmigration from life to life, serves as the initial force or

motive in all his actions, directs every choice of man—true or false, good or evil, painful or pleasurable.

4. *Haumai* is that condition of mind which keeps man ignorant of the true reality, the true purpose of his life, and thus keeps him away from salvation and union with God.
5. Guru Angad has described *haumai* as a deep-rooted disease. So far as it remains as the condition of the mind, it (mind) cannot conduct itself in a healthy way. But, again, Guru Angad assures that the word of the Guru is the medicine which can cure the disease of ego.
6. An egoist everywhere sees the projection of his own mind only.
7. One hears the word of the Guru when the Supreme Being Himself blesses him with His grace. The will of the Supreme binds a man to transmigration while His grace liberates him from that bondage of the cycle of births and deaths. Ego binds a man, grace liberates.
8. Ego is the basis of individuality which at once separates one from the totality of life or cosmic and social life. This separation gives the idea of preservation of the self which leads to struggle for existence.
9. The idea of struggle for existence makes the egoist self-seeking, conceited, self-assertive, selfish and proud. As he secures his interests and himself, he develops a complex of superiority. He begins to feel proud of his caste, birth, country, creed, colour, sex, prowess, learning, culture, conduct, rituals, etc. Thus, he begins to feel that he is born to rule while others are there to serve his will and carry out his order. They are just the means to preserve and watch his interests.
10. Guru Nanak has nowhere given a hint that '*haumai*' can be purified and trained to serve nobler purposes or to work for the salvation of man. According to him 'ego' constitutes the wall of separation between God and man. So, this has to be completely removed; it is to be burnt, destroyed and eliminated altogether.
11. However, mind or consciousness is a great power. If mind becomes pure, it realizes God. Mind is not merely ego; it has

the powers of cognition, perception, understanding, reasoning and right discrimination. These functions of mind in Indian terminology, have been called *ahamkar*, *mana*, *chit*, *budhi*, *bibek*, etc. But mind is purified only when ego is banished completely. Mind must be rid of ego. Guru Granth describes ego as disease, falsehood, wall, dross, dirt, poison, etc. Mind, to be healthy, must get rid of the disease, falsehood, separation, dross, dirt and poison. When ego is banished nobler and higher faculties of mind come into play.

12. In the total scheme of God, ego makes the play of the world possible by creating the conflict between spirit and matter or good or evil. Ego is not what is called the free will as opposed to determinism. Man has no free will. His entire course is determined by the will of God. God Himself puts him on the path or evil or good, so called, for in fact the duality of evil and good also does not exist.

The Guru Granth calls the egoist as *manmukh* or *sakat*. He is mind-oriented and follows the irrational carnal urges of lust, anger, avarice, attachment and pride. He is thoroughly a materialist and is bound to the material joys. He is always double minded, vacillating between God and Mammon. When man shakes off ego, he merges his self with the cosmic self. Such a man considers himself as a drop in the ocean of life and understands that his good or interest is common with the good of the other members of the human society or family. Such a man identifies himself with the society. He has no individual interests. An egoist does everything with desire for reward or fruit for himself while a non-egoist is *niṣkam* (desireless) in all his actions.

#### IV

In the *Sidhgoshti* (A Dialouge with the Siddhas), Guru Nanak (vide stanza-68) says that an egoist creates a world of his own like the spider who weaves a web out of his ownself and is entangled in it and is thus killed ultimately by his own false creation. An egoist lives in an imaginary world of his own wherein he himself matters the most and remains the centre of the entire universe or a small circle of his relatives is all that matters. In selfishness, he thinks of his own salvation only and resorts to the so-called religious acts of supposed merit such as dips at the so-called holy places, alms-deeds, austerities, meditation,

*samadhis* (concentrations), recitations, mortification, etc. (*Asa-di-var*, VIII-2, also *ibid*, IX. 1, IV. 2). So-called men of religious piety who sin against others by discriminating against them on ground of caste, creed, birth, position, sex, learning, and claim superiority for themselves for observing *Shradh* or *sutak* or purity of the cooking-squares are indeed egoists. They do not meditate on the Name and live in a fool's paradise that these rituals and religious practices would save them. Similarly, men of power, wealth, position, beauty and bravery are proud, and in their egoism, care not a fig for the feelings of others, behave like tyrants, do high-handedness; but they also live in a world of their own fabrication as they have to reap the fruit of what they had sown. Being forgetful of the Name, all these men of ego suffer terribly.

In ego, a world springs up, O man,  
 Forgetting the Name, this world suffers.  
 A *Gurmukh* thinks of knowledge and truth,  
 and burns ego by the word of the Guru.  
 He is pure in mind, thought and word,  
 he merges with the True One.

(*Sidhgoshti*, 68)

A *Gurmukh* is the antithesis of an egoist. He meditates on the Name and so purifies his mind that all the evil and selfish tendencies leave him. This is banishing of the ego. There is no other remedy for the otherwise incurable disease of ego. Meditation on the Name alone can banish ego and make one the servant of God. The discipline of the Name inculcates in the devotee the virtues of temperance, honesty, non-attachment, moderation, gratitude and love of the Lord. These are the qualities of a servant of God too. This plane of character guarantees the state of bliss and continuous pleasure to a *Gurmukh*.

## V

Guru Nanak is more concerned with practical life than theorising. In *bānī*, he has placed *haumai* in opposition to *Hukam* (Supreme Will), *Seva* (service), *Gyan* (discriminating knowledge), *Sehj* (poise, middle-path), *Nam* (meditation, devotion) and *nir-laip* (non-attachment).

(1) In the *Japu* (pauri II), with which the *Guru Granth* opens, he has placed *haumai* in opposition to the Supreme Will or *hukam*, saying that one can be a man of realization and truthfulness only if he conducts

himself in accordance with the Supreme Will. He has drawn some sort of distinction between order and will, as it is the will which creates order. God is absolutely free to ordain an order. His will creates the order which works in the cosmic evolution and course. By His will : all forms come into being, they develop life in them, grow exalted, become good or evil, receive pain or pleasure, win Grace and get liberation or are doomed for ever in transmigration, etc.; but an egoist is led to believe, erroneously, that he can transgress the will or order and by his efforts or actions develop, get exalted, become good, get pleasure, and win liberation. By such thinking, he denies, not only the Supremacy of the Divine Will, but the absoluteness of the Supreme Being itself. The Guru asserts that 'all are subject to the Supreme Will, none outside its pale', but the egoist asserts that he is beyond the pale of the Supreme Will and thus he feels not the need of being devoted to that and meditating on the Name. The Guru asserts that a cosmic order exists, the egoist does not recognise this and feels that he can defy any order or rule. He does not care for the rules which make a man really exalted or otherwise, great or otherwise, and bring suffering or pleasure. He is selfish, self-willed, self-seeking and sins against the common interests of society or community. He defies the social laws. The egoist does not understand the supremacy of the will though it is there. He suffers for his ignorance as he constantly sins against humanity. He is not a responsible being and does not contribute to the total good of mankind by following higher and nobler tendencies which too are present in his mind. He is narrow in outlook. We must attune our will to the Supreme-will, our self to the higher self, and choose the higher course of good which may result in the good of all.

(2) As already referred to, Guru Nanak has placed *haumai* in opposition to *seva* or service of God which also means service of mankind. The man who wants to serve God must attune his ego to the Supreme-will. For this, he need develop a certain pattern of life. In opposition to his *sloke* on ego, the Guru has given the character of a servant of God as under :

The service of God is done by the men of temperate lives who  
meditate on Him as the truest of the true,

They refrain from treading the path of evil, and doing good, practise  
honesty.

They have broken the bonds of worldliness, and eat and drink moderately.

"Thou art lavish in Thy mercies, of which Thou givest daily ever-increasingly"—

Thus glorifying they obtain the glorious Lord.

(*Asa-di-var*, VII)

The conflict between ego and will-to-serve is removed when man, through the grace of Guru and God, meditates on the Name. By meditation and devotion, his will gets attuned to the will of the Supreme. Meditation on the Name gives him a set character which is temperate, refrains from the path of evil, practises honesty, is unattached to the world, eats and drinks moderately and thus obtains the Lord. A man of meditation believes that God is the giver of every gift and He gives through His mercy and gives ever-increasingly, while an egoist believes just the other way. He lives for himself only, lives intemperately, eats and drinks immoderately, and earns by hook or by crook, not caring the least for honesty. An egoist is bound or attached to the world; he is, first of all, attached to himself and pampers his body; he is attached to his own interests; he cares for the need of his family only and with that his circle ends. A servant of God looks after the needs of the humanity, the society and the community. He breaks the bonds of the body and the family or narrow considerations. Mankind is his family.

(3) Ego and right knowledge are always in opposition. In a hymn (No. 33) of *Sri rag*, Guru Nanak emphasises that a man of service who alone is honoured in the court of the Lord, is a man of right discrimination; he is a man of enlightenment which comes through living according to the teachings of the holy books, under the fear of the Lord and by knowing the truth. This man goes beyond the attractions and charms of *Maya* and is not deceived by it, while a greedy man, an egoist, always vacillates. The lamp of the mind, the Guru says, is lighted this way :

If we practise the teachings of the holy books,

If we put the wick of the Lord's fear in the lamp of the mind,

If we give it the fire of truth :

This, then, is the oil, and this is how the lamp is lighted.

If the inside is lit like this, then the Lord is obtained.

A man who is impressed by the word of the Guru, adopts such a way of life. He surrenders himself completely to the will of the Lord. He fears the Lord. An egoist does not care for the word of the Guru, nor for truth, nor for the Supreme-will. He believes that his own intellect is supreme and he can make no error. A man of pure intellect will serve mankind, not an egoist.

(4) Ego and *bhakti* (*nam-bhakti*) do not go together. Guru Amardas (*Vadhans*, Pada-IX) has emphatically stated that *haumai* (ego) and *nam* (meditation on the Name) are in direct conflict, the two can never dwell in the same mind. Guru Nanak (*Asa*, *Ashtpadi-II*), portraying the life of a man of meditation, says that externally he also appears to be a man of ego as he lives in the world and earns and spends like all men, but he then clarifies, he is unattached in his mind.

Outwardly he is an egoist,  
he appears to behave and eat like that;  
But he is liberated inwardly,  
he is never attached.

A *bhakta* lives in the world, earns and spends, rears up a family, brings up his children. But still he shares his earnings with others. He lives temperately and moderately. He can save to spend in the service of man. A servant of God can never be proud and egoistical. Meditation on the *Nam* gives non-attachment.

## VI

*Haumai* is, in fact, a denial of God, the Supreme Reality; it is the denial of the existence of a cosmic order, it is the denial of the oneness of the human society; it is denial of the path of love, knowledge, service and devotion; it is living in an imaginary world of own fancy; it is living in constant conflict with all else in the creation. But it is God's own creation to serve as an instrument of the play of life which He enjoys. God also sends the Guru to free men of the grip of *haumai* so that they may be reclaimed to God. The Guru is sent to mankind as God's grace to it. He banishes *haumai* root and branch and unites man with God again.

# GURU NANAK'S CONCEPT OF BHAKTI

*Sohan Singh*

## INTRODUCTION

1. Religion comes into being when a self-conscious human being, with limited powers, finds himself in confrontation with something which though unseen and mysterious, is yet felt to have Supreme Power in the world in which he lives. Finding himself as utterly and inescapably creaturely vis-a-vis the Power, he attempts to work out a way of life, which may make of himself as a protege of the mysterious Power. In this process he may achieve a form of personality and work out ways of attracting the benign aspects of the Power and warding off its sterner aspects, that is to say, of worshipping the Power as appropriate to its status in his or his community's life.

2. In the epoch in which religion arose in human communities (perhaps some 25 to 40 thousand years ago), animism was the dominant way in which men apprehended nature. A tree near which a man died had an evil spirit. A pool of water in a forest had its Spirit. Practically the whole of nature, including other human communities, were apprehended in this way. Accordingly, the Supreme Power of which we spoke in the previous para was considered as a Spirit, as a being with its own independent existence and its own independent personality. It was not a thing but a being with consciousness, apportioning good and evil to men and men's communities in accordance with His varying moods depending on whether He had received his due worship from men, who believed in it, or not.

## THREE PHASES OF RELIGION

3. Since the rise of religion it has passed through three stages. In the first stage, the Supreme Spirit, which we may term God, and who was the Almighty, was approached with fear and awe. Such a view of God came natural to the primitive man due to the precarious tenure of his earthy life, when death for him lurked at every turn. To obtain his



favour, or to mitigate his displeasure, he had to be appeased by sacrifices, performed with meticulous care and by priests who were supposed to be His special agents among men. In the second stage, the religious man turns inward. What he had now to sacrifice was not some external object but his own ego to the Lord who is willing to help men. He needed no priest for this sacrifice, but he did need a teacher to show him the true path of self-sacrifice. In the third stage religious man again oriented himself outward to go into the world of man with compassion in his heart to relieve the sufferings of his fellow man and he saw God as Truth. Thus, the symbol of religious life in the first stage was the Awesome Almighty and the priest, in the second stage it was the saint and the Lord, in the third stage it was the missionary and God as Truth. In the first stage, God was transcendent, in the other two as immanent. The way of *bhakti* belongs mainly to the second stage with a spillover to the third stage. We will deal with it in some detail here, especially in the Indian religious background, and the colour which Guru Nanak gave to the *Bhakti* way of life.

### THE BHAKTI CULT

4. In India the *Bhakti* cult is almost as old as the earlier Upanishads and as much *Punditized* with sutras and glosses and Gurus as the Vedanta and other Darshanas. In fact, in the characteristically Indian climate of Philosophy and religion (in India the two are indistinguishable one from the other), one, teacher could expound his own mode of Darshan and at the same time claim to be a *bhakta*. The great Shankar, for example, was, of course, an outstanding Vedantist but he was also a *bhakta*. In the later middle ages, however, the *Bhakti* cult came to preponderate. The reason for its preponderance was two-fold. Firstly, the various *Darshanas* fell into the slough of stagnation and, secondly, whereas the Brahmins would not permit a non-Brahmin to take to the study of the various *Darshanas*, especially the *Vedanta*, the way of *bhakti* was open to all, irrespective of caste or sex. It was also supposed to be an easier path toward liberation from the bondage of *Sansar*. In fact, some men from almost the lowest rungs of caste system, like Ravidas, won great renown as *bhaktas*.

### ITS CHARACTERISTICS

5. The essence of *bhakti* is simple in concept : man has to give up his ego. The ego is identified with certain desires and urges, the

fulfilment of which is pleasurable or beneficial to only the individual (or his we-group) in whom these desires or urges inhere. These internal forces which drive the individual to seek his own good are called the *vasanas*. Buddhism stopped here. The way of the religious man is to rise above the *vasanas* and to eradicate them. However, as we saw, religion is a bipolar phenomenon, one pole of it is the finite being, the man, and the other pole is the vast, the Infinite Other, or God. Now, there are two ways in which a man can give up these deep-rooted *vasanas*. He can do so through fear of some one. But in the inward directed phase of religion, coercing out the *vasanas* cannot be a religious mode. The other way, the way leading to the inner, the religious development of man is to give up the desires purely for the sake of the love of someone. That is how it comes about that the bond between a religious man and the Supreme One at this stage of development of religion is that of love. Narad thus defines *bhakti* "as of the nature of Supreme Love of God." (A, I, 2 p. 1).

### FORMS OF BHAKTI

6. A *bhakta* may love or worship his Lord in any form. Mostly, he may worship Him in any personal form, such as Lord Krishna, or the Universal Mother or as Siva or even their idols. The strange fact is that the sole love of God in any form leads to the same mental state of mind, which we call bliss. But any form in which God may be worshipped should be the highest form of God. In contrast to many *bhaktas*, Guru Nanak's devotion was solely directed to *Nam*, the Universal, Creative Spirit. There is here a subtle distinction between the worship of a personal deity and that of *Nam*—the Formless (*Nirankar*), Universal and Creative spirit—namely, that though both types of worship lead to bliss (or *nirwan* or *anand*), through the sheer shedding of egoism, the worshipper of *Nam*, in addition to bliss, is filled with wonder (*vismad*) at the endlessly varied and varying forms (*the kudarat*), through which *Nam* evolves itself in the universe. Unfortunately, the followers of Guru Nanak themselves have let the distinction lapse through default by misunderstanding *Nam* as if it was just another personal deity.

7. The Indian writers on *Bhakti* have classified these modes of love in five forms : 1. *Sant bhava* (the calm mood), 2. *Dasya bhava*, love of servant to his master, 3. *Sakhya bhava*, love between friends;

such as the love between Arjuna and Lord Krishna, 4. *Vatsalya bhava*, the love between parents and children, such as Yasodha's love of Shri Krishana and 5. *Madhurya bhava*, such as the love between husband and wife (B, p. 33). Guru Nanak has sung of *Nam* in almost all these forms. For example, he says, "O my mind, love God as the lotus flower loves water; even if the waves of water beat it, the lotus burgeons with love." (*Sant*) (59-60). "The servant should serve God by offering Him even his life, which he got from Him." (*Dasya*, 661). "I have not seen a better friend than you whom we should serve or befriend." (*Sakhya*, 221). Guru Nanak has not made much use of *Vatsalya Bhava*, though in the writings of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, it is quite prominent. As regard the *Madhurya bhava*, that is, the love between husband and wife, Guru Nanak, in a way, has made it the chief symbol of the *bhakta's* or *Gurmukh's*, as he calls the *bhakta*, love of God. Just to give an example, "I have fallen in love with my husband, who is eternal and all pervading." (843). It will be seen that in all the various modes of *bhakti*, the love of God had not only nothing in common with carnal love, but the two are completely contrary to one another. Worldly love may sometime, but not invariably, be a source of pleasure, but the love of God yields bliss—a state of mind much superior to that of pleasure.

### THE TRUE TEACHER

8. There is also a consensus among the great *bhaktas* that it is necessary that a man who wants to take to the way of *bhakti* must have a teacher to guide him, a teacher who having scaled the ultimate heights of love of God is called Satguru or the true teacher. As Guru Nanak says, "Without the true teacher we cannot obtain *Nam*, and without *Nam* what worth is there (in this life) ?," (58) or, more forcefully, "The beneficent true Guru helps us in obtaining liberation and cures us from all ailments (arising from egoism), from which we obtain the nectar (of life)." (1028). The means by which the true teacher is able to help the novice on the way of *bhakti* is termed by Guru Nanak as '*sabd*'. The word used by Hindu *bhaktas* to describe the communications from the true teacher to the novice is '*mantra*'. But *sabda* describes the communications more effectively. In the first place, a *mantar* may be composed of a few words which, unless it is to be a mechanical parrot-like repetition, must need further explanation, thus bringing it nearer to *sabda*. Secondly, while the *mantra* needs a personal communication

between the teacher and the disciple, *sabda* of the true teacher can reach the disciple in more indirect ways, such as through his writings etc. It is known that some of the great leaders of *bhakti* way had themselves not sat at the feet of a true teacher. Does it mean that in such cases *sabda* was dispensible ? I think not. It is known that some of the great *bhaktas* were even in their childhood of a reflective type and sought eagerly the company of religious men. Some words of a participant in these discussions struck a sensitive chord in the mind of a burgeoning *bhakta*. Even this is *Sabda*. A deep reflection of such *Sabdas*, on the part of an aspiring *bhakta* resulted in articulating it so that it may fit into the evolving pattern of his thoughts and take a form communicable to others. The infrastructure of all civilization is communication and the religious aspect of a civilization is no exception to this rule. And for the religious mind a well articulated piece of religious communication is a *Sabda*.

### THE ADHIKARI

9. In Hindu religious literature much attention has been given to the qualifications of an *adhihari*, that is, a man who wishes to take to the way of *bhakti*, his initiation into the practice of *bhakti* and *sadhana* that is, the training which he should undergo to reach the heights of *bhakti*. We will give an example of each and also give Guru Nanak's views on them.

10. In his *Vivekachudamani*, Shanskar lays down four qualifications of an *adhihari* as follows :

1. Ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal.
2. Disinclination to enjoy the fruits of one's action, i.e. *Vairagya*.
3. Having the six virtues of tranquility, self-control, withdrawal, forbearance, faith and concentration on the self, and an
4. Intense yearning for liberation (C. Page 165).

Guru Nanak laid no criteria for an *adhihari*—except that he should lend his ear and heart to the true teacher, (even this orientation to the teacher is a matter of His Grace), and that he should keep the company of saints of God-oriented men (i.e. Gurmukhs). For example, in one place he says, "It is by His Grace, and not by one's own efforts, that we realize Him. (What we have to do) is to cling to the Guru's feet abandoning our egos." (69). Again, "The congregation of saints is a place of pilgrimage. There we meet the true teacher, (which is as holy as according to Hindu belief) is bathing in the 68 places of pilgrimage." (597).

## INITIATION INTO THE BHAKTI WAY

11. According to Goswami, when a man has become disillusioned in the pleasures of life and hence wants to take to the bhakti way, he places himself under a worthy *acharya*, (Guru or teacher). The teacher and the disciple live together for a year, so that the *acharya* may convince himself of the fitness of his disciple, he initiates him into the relevant *mantras*, of which 'Oam' is the first. The exact time of the initiation is then fixed taking into account the auspicious month, the day, the heavenly constellations and the spot. Water is brought from a sacred lake or river or a place of pilgrimage, the sacred garland of beads is made to be worn by the novice and to the accompaniment of sacred *mantras* the aspirant is put on the path of *bhakti* by undergoing certain discipline. (D. pp 273 ff).

## SADHANA OR DISCIPLINE

12. The *Sadhana* by which the aspirant arrives at the peak of *bhakti* differs from sect to sect. According to the Vedantists, the bondage which holds mankind in its clutches is due to the fact that, because of our past *karams* we are deceived by *Maya*, the *Shakti* of *Brahman* Itself, from realizing the essential identity between the self and the *Brahman* (God in His inherent nature characterised by existence, consciousness and bliss). The worldly man is held in bondage to *sansar* due purely to his ignorance, due to *maya*, of the identity between self and *Brahman* and the identification of his self with his body. A man can overcome this ignorance by a course of life (*Sadhana*) consisting of *sravana*, that is, the devoted attention to the precepts of his teacher, *manan*, i.e. deep contemplation and perpetual preoccupation with the Truth of self as *Brahman* and ceaseless vigilance and through meditation cultivate the equanimity of self, *nidhidyasan* (C.p. 159). During this process of *sravan*, *manan* and *nidhiyasana* the aspirant continues to renounce all desire and activity. This kind of *sadhana* eventually results in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, that is, meditation of *Brahman* in his essential nature as existence, consciousness and bliss. On achieving *nirvikalpa samadhi* all knots of desires are loosened, all past *karams* which held the aspirant in bondage to *sansar* are destroyed, (C.p. 200), and the aspirant achieves consciousness and bliss, likened to the bliss one experiences in deep sleep. (C.p. 174).

13. In the *Vaishnava* (worship of *vishnu*, especially, in his

embodiment as Krishna) and *Saiva* (worship of *Siva*) way of *bhakti*, the Lord is first worshipped in the form of an idol, the *salagram* (or the Divine stone) among the *Vaishnavas* and the *linga* among the *Saivas* (D.p. 941). The worship consists of such a deep contemplation of the worshipped God, that the worshipper gradually loses his own ego and is merged in the vision of his God (or the Universal Mother). In the last stage of this kind of *Sadhana*, the emblem or the idol with which the aspirant starts, yields place to the manifest vision of God (*vishnu*, *Shiva* or Universal Mother) in the worshipper's *savikalpa Samadhi*, that is, meditation on the deity in his own form. Later, the *savikalpa samadhi* is transformed into *nirvikalpa samadhi*, when all vestiges of egoism vanish and the worshipper enters the bliss we mentioned in the previous para.

14. The *Tantric sadhana*, which was undergone by the great-souled Sri Rama Krishana, is more drastic. In order that a worshipper lose all tendencies of attachment and aversion which are inherent in man's raw ego, practices normally repulsive to a man of the world, are undertaken. For example, Shri Ramakrishna tasted the faeces of other men, ate human flesh cooked in a human skull, and ate the leavings of jackals. (B. pp. 170, 199, 149 and 203).

15. The *Sadhanas* mentioned in the previous five paras have been given as illustration of how far the *punditization* and professionalization of *bhakti* went, mostly in the hands of Brahmins. Guru Nanak steered clear of practices which would leave the common man beyond the pale of *bhakti*. For him initiation was the decision of a man to place himself under a great teacher who could lead him out of suffering inevitable for a worldly man. In this way a *Gurmukh*, or a Guru-oriented man himself became an *adhikari* and he himself initiated himself on the way of *bhakti*. In so far as *sadhana* is concerned, it arises from Guru Nanak's clear perception that egoism is anti-God and egoism and God cannot subsist simultaneously in the same heart. 'If I have egoism in my heart, you are not there, and if you are there then egoism is not there.' (1092). In accordance with this precept, the *Sadhana* for the common man is three-fold. First, do not let Him out of your mind. "Why should we forget Him to Whom belongs our life" (16), or "Why should we forget Him on whom all living beings depend" (58). Thus *Nam simaran*, that is reciting and singing of *Sabda* or

meditation on *Nam*, is the first *Sadhana* of a follower of Guru Nanak. Second, keep your equanimity in happiness and suffering. "We should be equanimous in happiness and suffering. Happiness is obtained only by comprehending the *Sabda*." (57). In fact, as hinted here, the happiness and suffering should be treated as His Will, to accept which is the main *Sadhana* for a follower of Guru Nanak. "It is for men to accept the Will of the king of kings." Thirdly, a *bhakta* or *Gurmukh* should, instead of renouncing the world, serve humanity. "Without service (to humanity), no one attains (liberation), for, service is the sum and substance of good conduct". (992). This is the *Sadhana* for the common man. For the more advanced souls, if we take the *karam khand* of *Japuji* as the highest stage of *bhakti*, the individual has to proceed through the three regions of *Dharam Khand*, *Gyan Khand*, and *Saram Khand* before arriving at *Karam Khand* (for the explanation of these stages see the author's *The Seeker's Path*.)

#### OTHER ASPECTS OF BHAKTI

16. We will now mention six characteristics of a *bhakta's* mind, when he has ascended the higher (or highest) ladder of *bhakti*, characteristics which are also endorsed by Guru Nanak. In the first place, through whatever path a *bhakta* comes to have the vision of God, God is seen by him as One, without a second. Whether a *bhakta* be a *Vaishnava* or *Saiva*, or worshipper of the Universal Mother, or even a Christian or a Muslim for him there is only One Supreme Reality—that of God. As Guru Nanak says, "The Guru has said God is one. How then can we worship another?" (224).

(b) According to a *bhakta's* concept of God, He dwells in the Universe and the Universe exists in Him. Says Guru Nanak, "His Spirit dwells in Creation, and the Creation exists in Him. He fills the Universe, without any external mechanism." Or, "You are the honey bee, you are the flower, the fruit and the tree. You are the Creator of the creatures in the sea. It is difficult for me to comprehend what You are." (1020)

(c) As God dwells in everything in the Universe, He dwells in the heart of a *Gurmukh* (the teacher-oriented man). So that "Whatever the *bhakta* does, he does so as ordained by You." Guru Nanak called himself as His minstrel, and whatever he said, it was God at Whose bidding he said what he said, "I do not know what to say. Whatever I have said, it is as ordered by Him." (763) Again, "You Yourself give

greatness to a man and get those deeds done by him, which bring him the greatness". The final bliss of *bhakti* is due to His Grace. Such being the belief of a *bhakta*, all his activities are dedicated to Him.

(d) As we and all other creatures are from Him, non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion (*daya*) are the two great traits of a *bhakta*. Says Guru Nanak on non-violence, "He who has let Him dwell in his heart, he is free pride and he discards avarice and violence against others." (1198). Compassion : "Him we know as having Truth, who takes to the true teaching, namely, he who has compassion for life and does good and gives alms to other." 468.

(e) As the destruction of egoism is a very hard task, once a *bhakta's* mind is free from it in his words and deeds, he considers himself as twice-born. One has to die to his earlier life, in order to be born in his new life as a *bhakta*. A man who has decided to take to the life of *bhakti* knows and accepts this fact. Guru Nanak has put it in vivid terms as follows : "If you like to play the game of love (of the Lord), then (says the Lord) you should put your head on the palm of your hand, (that is, pre-accept death). When setting feet on this path (*of bhakti*), you should not shrink from offering your head." (i.e. life) (1412).

(f) The ultimate stage of *Bhakti*, called *Parabhakti*, is such a blissful experience that it is difficult to describe it. He who has attained *Parabhakti*, experiences it, but does not find words to describe it. Sutrās 51 and 52 of the Narad's Bhakti Sutrās express this fact as follows : "The intrinsic nature of devotion defies exact and precise analysis, definition or description. It is like the experience of joy which a dumb man has when he tastes something sweet." (AP 15). Says Guru Nanak, "Drinking the nectar of *bhakti* we attain to supreme happiness, when the mind dwells in His own House (599). They alone know the deliciousness of this experience of *bhakti* who have tasted it. It is like a dumb man tasting sweetmeat (599)." Because the experience of *Parabhakti*, the highest stage of *bhakti*, is of such indescribable bliss, a *bhakta* ascribes his having had it as due purely to His Grace, and some *bhaktas* ascribe to His Grace even the efforts a man makes to achieve *Parabhakti*. As Guru Nanak says, "We achieve (holy life) due to His Grace. A man cannot achieve it by himself." (61).

17. Paradoxically, the reaching of the height of *bhakti* where one



leaves his ego behind, (and it is this egolessness which is full of bliss), is almost universally called self-realization. And that is not only what the Vedantists say, Guru Nanak also speaks a similar language. "Those who have realized their self, they have also realized the Supreme self (that is, God). The two belong to one tree of nectar and their fruit is also the same. Those who have tasted this fruit of immortality, they remain satiated with the Truth. They do not fall into the error of differentiation between the self and the Supreme Self; they get completely assimilated in God (421)."

18. Finally, there are some *bhaktas* who having tasted the bliss of *Parabhakti*, give up the life of the world. For example, our Vedantists give up social life when they have attained to the highest stage of *bhakti* in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the meditation on the identity of self and *Brahman*. Of such men St. John of Cross has said : "To seek satisfaction in God is spiritual gluttony." And the non-Vedantic *bhakti* tradition in India has rejected the idea of inactivity after having attained *Parabhakti*. Thus Narad says : "The attainment of *bhakti*, or even for the attainment of it, life in society need not be shunned, but only the fruits of all social activities are to be surrendered to the Lord, while all such activities naturally righteous and so bearing noble fruit may be continued." (A Sutra 61, p. 18). Similarly, Guru Nanak has said, "Those men are unique in this world, who reflect on the teachings of the true teacher solitarily and having themselves realized God they help men in the whole congregation (to get out of egotism). Indeed, their life in the world has been fruitful." (1039).

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## GURU NANAK'S CONCEPTION OF MAYA

*Wazir Singh*

*Māyā* belongs to the class of concepts that have acquired the status of philosophic categories. In the philosophy of naturalism, for instance, nature is regarded as the ultimate category, and reality to the super nature or transcendent being is denied. By contrast, the idealist asserts consciousness, experience or idea as the sole category of his metaphysics. These fundamental modes of existence, or ultimate principles of understanding and experience, are, in the final analysis, products of the human mental activity. They do not refer so much to one or another of the entities in the external world, as to the speculative realm of man's life. All philosophy, in this sense, is play of concepts supported by fancy and argument, and inspired by purposes that embrace the truths of life, the universe, or the totality of being. In one of the attempts to comprehend the nature of reality, some of the philosophic minds in India invented the concept of *māyā* and, with the help of this child of speculation, offered an alternative interpretation of the world inhabited by man, adding to the charming diversity of theories contending for supremacy.

One of the thinkers and exponents of the characteristically Indian view of life, who not only continued the *māyā* tradition of thought in his own way, but contributed to its enrichment, was the poet-philosopher Guru Nanak. He employed the concept of *māyā* in his poetry as part of his repertory, in order to bring home to mankind his message of ethico-spiritual life. As distinct from his predecessors in the region of philosophy proper, and in line with the poet-devotees, Guru Nanak extended the area of application of the term *māyā* by adopting it as a symbol in the conceptual framework of his poetry. He was not bound, in his poetic freedom, by the strictly metaphysical nuances of the term. Rather, he moulded the concept of *māyā* to the needs of his composition and its content, making use of it in a symbolic sense to communicate

his image of evil, sometimes investing the term with an enhanced meaning through its combination with another component, as in *moh-māyā*, *māyāmamtā*, etc.

### SUBJECT-OBJECT OF MĀYĀ

The problem of *māyā* in philosophy is intimately linked with some of the other metaphysical problems such as subject-object, appearance and reality, man and God. It is also connected with the issue of knowledge and ignorance. *Māyā* is variously described as veil or curtain concealing reality, appearance of the phenomenal world as against things-in-themselves, the grand illusion or the cosmic principle of illusion. In any case, it makes a necessary reference to living beings, in particular to man, whose vision is obscured by the spell of *māyā*, or to whom the manifold world comes as an illusory experience. *Māyā* as ignorance is essentially human ignorance, or more pointedly, that of an individual who has yet to work his way to illumination and knowledge. In brief, *māyā* is assumed to stand between man and reality, producing error and illusion in the human mind, and creating difficulties in the individual's way to a state of knowledge and bliss. Thus conceived, it is the Indian counter-part of the devil,—the evil incarnate.

Guru Nanak-Bāni presents *māyā* from the objectivist as well as the subjectivist point of view. Firstly, as in common parlance, the term *māyā* denotes wealth or riches. An individual engrossed in the worldly possessions is *māyādhāri* who remains oblivious of the spiritual aspect of life. Such a one is castigated as blind and deaf in the *Bāni*. Secondly; attractions of the worldly life in general are characterized as *māyā*. Their spell is cast not only on human beings, but on all forms of life, including *devi* and *deva* who long for the enjoyment of worldly charms. Thirdly, the phenomenal world or the universe itself is *māyā* which is identical with nature at all levels—physical, biological, mental, created and established by the Divine ordinance. This view depicts *māyā* at the height of objectivity, as a living, operating, seemingly endless, colourful world of names and forms. Human consciousness, which is a part of the phenomenal world of *māyā*, not only mirrors this world, but engages itself in the uncovering of its depths and the discovering of its truths. All human endeavour, common sense and reason, all science and philosophy, all technological ventures and probes form part of the struggle to solve the riddle of this empirical but mysterious world.

If the external world of sense and inference symbolizes *māyā* as the object, the inner, mental world of man represents *māyā* as the subject. In the *Nanak-Bāni*, one prominent subjective aspect of *māyā* is the passionate self of man—his sensuous, possessive, egoistic nature. Another aspect is represented by human attachment with the world—*moh-māyā* or infatuations which prevent man from rising above his individuality and relativity. However, the summit of *māyā*'s subjectivity is shown as ignorance—the true character of *māyā*, which also provides foundation to the doctrine of Illusionism. Here, the objective and the subjective of *māyā* converge : the phenomenal world appears to human consciousness, and consciousness is of the phenomena of nature. Neither the external world nor human experience is real : both are illusory. *Māyā* is reflecting *māyā*. Human ignorance indulges in the fanciful building up of the world of appearance. The subject (ignorance) is hooked up with the object (illusion)—both products of *māyā* and both identical with *māyā*.

### THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

In considering the approach of Guru Nanak to the question of *māyā*, it may be asked which of the two aspects, the subjective and the objective, has been emphasized in his *Bāni*. One interpretation classifies Guru Nanak with the exponents of the Advaita Vedanta school. This line of thinking strives to demonstrate the falsity of the world, considering it as the product of a creative illusion that is *māyā*. Reality on this view is non-dual; it is *Brahman* or the Absolute; nothing other than *Brahman* really exists or is really real. The other major interpretation of Guru Nanak's faith seeks to affirm that the natural world is real and true; it is the product of God's creativity and cannot be dismissed as a mere illusion. God himself has assumed the manifest form of the cosmic order. The failure on our part to view the universe as God in his immanent aspect, is due to our ignorance or infatuation, which is nothing but *māyā*.

It is true that the Advaitic doctrine considers *māyā* from the subjective point of view and explains it in terms of *avidyā* or ignorance of the human soul. When the individual frees himself from the influence of *māyā*, he awakes to the reality of a single non-dual, eternal *Brahman*. To him, *māyā* is no more; it has come to an end. However, this is one part of the story. The other part treats of *māyā* as *anādi* or beginningless;

it is also indescribable. The world of names and forms is a product of *māyā*, which is indicative of *māyā*'s unique powers of creation and of concealing reality. It is *māyā* that misleads the human soul into taking a distorted view of the essential reality. The human soul is of the same character as the universal Spirit, that is *Brahman* but the influence of *māyā* does not allow the individual to pierce the veil and realize this identity. He goes on mistaking the world as real in itself. This part of the theory portrays *māyā* as an objective entity, whose nature, though partially grasped, remains on the whole indeterminate.

Thus, the Advaitic category of *māyā* is designed to serve as the fundamental mode of existence endowed with supreme powers. Its being is conceived as parallel to that of *Brahman*, for both are treated as beginningless and beyond adequate expression. Only to a spiritually advanced individual *māyā* ceases to be, and *Brahman* alone remains. By implication, *māyā* continues to exist for the rest of mankind. Its objectivity and its powers of creation and deception must last as long as any of the spiritually less evolved creatures inhabit any part of the universe. It is this extreme objectification of *māyā* in the Vedantic theory, to which Guru Nanak does not seem to subscribe. He does not assign to it the character of a metaphysical category, in the framework of his poetic compositions.

### **MĀYĀ AND THE NATURAL ORDER**

In his references to the external world, Guru Nanak has employed the terms *jagat* (or *jag*), *duniyā*, *srishti* (or *sirthi*), *khand-brahmand*, *qudrat*, as also *māyā*. Some other terms, e.g. *lok*, *sunya*, *khel* and *rachnā* also find place in the *Bāni*. All of these may be interpreted as referring to the creativity of the Divine. The phenomenal world emanates from Him and is the manifestation of His formless essence. The Guru refers to 'the entire world of observation as *māyā-chhāyā*—implying that the universe is not an ever-lasting entity; it is shadowy in character, subject to temporal process, and destined to end in 'four days'—as figuratively put. This emphasis on the ephemerality and non-permanence of the cosmic order is perhaps the key to the interpretation of Guru Nanak's conception of *māyā* and the world. *Māyā* is that of which the essence is time; it has come into being at the will of the Divine, and must disappear when He so ordains. In other words, nature as creation is neither beginningless nor self-sufficient. It rests in the creator whose

embodiment it is.

Thus, *māyā* and nature (*qudrat*) seem identical in the Nanak-Bāni. The world of nature may be taken as *māyā* incarnate, denying any special or extra-ordinary existence to *māyā*. This amounts to asserting that the world exists in its own right as established by the Divine Will and not as a product of some supposed intermediary, namely *māyā*. It also means that the order of nature is not to be considered an illusion pure and simple. We must not associate any real value with the phenomenal world, because, as the teachings goes, it is not everlasting or eternal. However, it may be 'illusory' in the sense that it appears to us permanent, whereas its real status is that of creation. Accordingly, the world is not rejected as illusion in the Nanak-Bāni, in spite of its occasional characterization in terms of *māyā* or *chhāyā*, or an edifice of smoke, etc. It is the *qudrat* of the *Qādir* whose creativity is not in doubt anywhere in the *Bāni*.

In the Western philosophy, Plato is credited with the view that treats of the phenomenal world as a veil or illusion. But Plato shows keep interest in the world and its affairs, especially the socio-political and moral life of the people. His rejection of the space-time world is only partial and is based on his dislike for sensory knowledge. In his attempt to establish the superiority of the rational faculty in cognizing the higher truths, he posited an ideal world of immutable essences, which formed the foundation for the imitative world of phenomena that was 'unreal'. The objective idealism of the modern period does not assume another world that is real, apart from the world known to us in our commonsense experience. Its point of departure is the view that reality belongs to the concrete whole and not to any part abstracted from it. Parts are appearances treated as physical, biological etc. The whole or the Absolute is 'experience' itself, which affirms the spiritual or ideal nature of reality. The Absolute is taken as the single self-differentiating system, characterized by harmony and comprehensiveness.

In the first view, the order of nature is an imitation of the heavenly world of essences, whereas the second view considers nature as an appearances of the all-inclusive reality. By contrast, Guru Nanak's view presents nature as an order of creation, with the immanent creative Spirit observing it in freedom and joy. The self-differentiating principle

of the Absolute, in the idealist theory, assumes in the *Bāni* the figure of self-installation of the supreme Self in the form of the natural order of diversity and multiple entities. Guru Nanak's cosmology views the cosmos as a manifestation of the unmanifest, a truthful embodiment of the supremely real, a concrete image of the power of Being that was pure spirituality, variously depicted as the Void, the Formless, the Origin, and the True. The creative principle is symbolized as *Onkār*, *Nām*, as also the *Qādir*. The illusionism of the *māyā*-theory is thus replaced with the principle of creativity and of self-manifestation.

### THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE OF NATURE

The universe of Guru Nanak's conception may be interpreted as emanating from the individuating principle of ego in man, as alluded to in the *Siddha-Goshti*. If so, the world must be governed by processes of the human mind. However, this interpretation scarcely accords with the general intent of the *Bāni*, except in the sense that the appearance of the world cannot be dissociated from experience. Some sort of mental energy must be present to *experience* the existence; in the absence of sentient capacity, no allusion to or assertion of any sort of reality is possible. However, acceptance of a relation between existence and experience does not entail dependence of the former on the latter. How the world appears?—It appears in the consciousness of living beings. But, who is the author of the world?—Not human ego; it is the supreme Spirit itself. Accordingly, the governing principle of nature is the ordinance of the Divine, the *hukam*, that maintains the elements, the land and waters, the stars and plants in fact the entire spatiotemporal cosmos and its processes. All matter, life and mind obey the discipline of that single absolute authority which transcends all discipline, control or order. All else is under the 'fear' of the One that is fearless in itself.

Guru Nanak depicts the powers of the Divine in numerous dimensions, according to the poetic mood of the occasion. Sometimes he is addressing the Creator in his personified aspect, as the author of the universe that is real and true. Whatever He has established, cannot be false or unreal. Rather, the True one himself has taken on the garb of the manifest nature. On other occasions, the creative power is portrayed as the Void, the formless indeterminate being, whose nature is beyond estimation or intelligibility. The extent of his ordinance can hardly be imagined and measured, howsoever the wise in their wisdom

and poets in their fancy may try. Guru Nanak, himself a poet of the highest order, expresses a deep sense of mystery and ecstasy when he comes to viewing the vastness of creation and its origin. Yet, there are occasions when he presents the outlines of his vision of the cosmic evolution, in terms of the air, water and fire originating from their only source that is Truth, bringing into being the multi-dimensional world of ours. Or it may be in terms of the nebulous darkness that prevailed while the formless Void remained in trance prior to his act of creation; naught was in existence then, neither land nor skies, neither gods nor men, neither faith nor knowing; when the unmanifest so willed, the processes of nature came into being and became manifest with countless facets and appearances. The creative and governing principle of the universe is nothing but the inscrutable will of the mystery that is Divine.

Of course, the figures of *Brahman*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, as also of *māyā* frequently find place in the *Bāni*, indicative of the link with the tradition of Indian thought. But these figures stand for the powers of the Divine in the framework of Guru Nanak's diction. Brahman cannot be taken in the literal sense of creator with absolute authority. Likewise, *māyā* as an independent creative power would be out of place with the spirit of Nanak-Bāni. The only agency that governs the processes of nature is nature itself as an embodiment of the Divine ordinance. If this aspect of nature were to be identified as *māyā* in the objective sense, no contradiction would be involved, since the existence of nature is recognized in the *Bāni* in the form of '*qudrat*' of the *Qādir*. However, if nature is viewed as an independent realm, final in itself, then the interpretation fails to cohere with Guru Nanak's over-all view of reality. He himself describes such a world as false—that is, a world which is falsely viewed as real in itself, without the presence of its creative Spirit. The thrust of the poetic depiction seems to be that world is real if the Divine immanence is realized in every part and corner of it; the same world is false and unreal if we fail to observe Him residing in the natural order.

Ultimately, therefore, it is left to the human individual to look at the universe as mere nature devoid of God, or to view it imbued with his spiritual presence. Guru Nanak teaches man to adopt a way of life consistent with the intuitive vision of theistic immanence. Such a vision results in the ordering of the multiplicity of forms into a systematic



unity. Alternatively, the world of plurality without a unifying principle of harmony and coherence, is indicative of a vision confined to sense-experience alone; it is governed by the individuating influence of the human ego. The Nanak-Bāni is a constant reminder of the limits imposed upon man by his native ignorance; it serves to awaken him to the spiritual truth of existence and its governing principle, namely the Divine will. The order of nature that appears to the subjectivity of the individual is *māyā*. Its essence, according to the *Bāni*, is not within the reach of the ego. It is only when the inner vision is in tune with the essence-in-existence that *māyā* is dispelled, and illumination of the self is attained.

# GURU NANAK'S CONCEPTION OF THE NAM AND SURAT-SABD YOGA

*Bhai Jodh Singh*

The word *Nam* has been used in two senses in Guru Nanak's *Bani*, as an appellation and as a symbol to denote the All-pervading Supreme Reality that sustains the universe. To realize this Presence is the aim of an individual soul set forth by the Guru. Again and again he emphasizes this point in his teachings, "He alone lives, who enshrines God in his heart : Nanak, none else lives. Even if he lives, he will depart dishonoured. All he eats goes waste : Intoxication of wealth, intoxication of royalty, the shameless fellow dances under their influence. Nanak ! he will depart defrauded and deprived. Without the Name he will die disgraced !"¹

"Those who have not relished the taste of love, cannot know the purpose (of life) fixed by the Bridegroom : Like a guest entering an uninhabited house they depart (empty-handed) as they came. The swan (soul) has given up singing praises of God and is pecking at carrions, earning a hundred reproaches by day and a thousand by night. Cursed is the life spent in mere gluttony and distending the tummy. Nanak, except love for the True Name, all other attachments are inimical (to the soul)."<sup>2</sup>

How to realize this Presence ? The first step is to recite, understand and delve deep in the Guru's word.

"This body is the market place of the bullion merchant (God). O brother, the business man who reflects on Guru's word sticks firmly to the merchandise displayed in it. Blessed is the trader who being united with the word (of the Guru) engages in this trade."<sup>3</sup>

and

"One returns home earning profit if by Guru's word he knows the ineffable."<sup>4</sup>

Religious life as defined by Guru Nanak does not consist in mechanical performance of rites and ceremonies. According to him the basis of spiritual life is the right conduct as portrayed by the Guru. "Nothing can approach Truth but Right conduct excels it."<sup>5</sup> The pure in heart will find God. "Truth can be contained only in a pure vessel (heart) but few adopt pure conduct."<sup>6</sup> Again to emphasize this point he says, "Shun vice and run after virtue. Those who commit sins will have to repent. Those who cannot distinguish between right and wrong occasion sink in mud (of sins) again and again. With dirt of greed inside and much falsity in speech, why are you bathing your body from outside. Through the Guru ever repeat the pure Name, then alone will your inside become pure. Shun covetousness, give up calumny then you will be rewarded through Guru's word. Keep me in the way that pleases Thee, O God, Thy servant will glorify thee through the word."<sup>7</sup>

The followers of Semitic religions offer animals in sacrifice to atone for their sins. Some Indians think that a bath in a river which they consider holy will wash off their sins. Others undergo severe penances and perform austerities for the same purpose. But mortification of flesh does not clean the heart of its evil propensities. Desires, the cause of frustration and misery cannot be annihilated by these means. "Some pick up roots and hide in forests. Some roam in ochre-coloured robes calling themselves *yogis* and *srnyasis*. Full of desire inside hankering after food and clothes they waste their time in vain : They are neither householders nor anchorites. They cannot avoid death and desires arising out of three modes (*gunas*). The god of death cannot approach those who listen to the Guru's instruction. He (*yama*) becomes a servant of their servants. Relying on the True Word and with Truth in their mind they practise detachment even while living in their homes. Nanak ! who serve their Satguru give up all desires."<sup>8</sup>

"When a man ascends the ladder of truth with the True Name on his lips, home and forest become the same to him. Automatically his evil understanding is destroyed, praises of God take its place. Subduing his mind he gets the illumination (mentioned) in the *six sastras*. He sees the light of God pervading everywhere and serving the Guru he reaches his real abode. But if he assumes the outer forms of various sects his desires increase. He undergoes the suffering resulting from

sensual pleasures and happiness leaves his body. Lust and anger rob his inner wealth. Let him get rid of scepticism and get salvation through the name."<sup>9</sup>

We remember those whom we love. Constant remembrance begets love of God in us. And "Those who are imbued with the love of God love all."<sup>10</sup> Egoism that begets hatred is destroyed and compassion for our fellow men takes its place. In serving others we feel pleasure and our whole being is filled with devotion to Him. "Guru's instruction leads to loving devotion. Egoism inside is destroyed through the word. The wandering mind is restrained and controlled and the True Name fills our being."<sup>11</sup>

The Guru does not prescribe animal sacrifices, performance of various forms of *yajnas*, bathing at sacred *Tirathas* or ascetic practices for the atonement of our sins. Loving devotion to Name accomplishes this purpose for a Sikh. "When hands, feet, trunk or body are soiled with dirt, washing them with water cleans them of it. When clothes became impure with urine, we wash them clean by soap. When our mind is defiled by sins, loving devotion to Name will wash it of that impurity."<sup>12</sup> "Impurity of (mind) will be removed by the True Name. Through the Guru's grace one should always keep his mind imbued with the Name."<sup>13</sup>

Mere mechanical repetition of the Name is of no avail in our spiritual progress. "Leaving the tongue, when one repeats the Name with the heart, then its full significance is realised"<sup>14</sup> i.e. repetition by tongue should result in constant remembrance by heart. When the name is enshrined in the heart then immanence of the Supreme spirit is realised. "In the ambrosial hours of the morning meditate on the True Name and His glory. By good actions a man gets the vesture (body) but the door of salvation is reached through His grace."<sup>15</sup>

From the time of Upanishads the discipline for self realisation was the practice of *Astang yoga* of Patanjali, details of which are given in his *yoga* aphorisms. Later on the system of *Hatha yoga* was adopted by the *Nath* sect of earsplit *yogins*. In both systems the practiser was advised to resort to lonely places like forests or mountain caves. In an appendix to the English translation of *yogic* aphorisms called *Raj yoga*, Swami Vivekananda quotes from Svetasvatra Upanishad the following sloka :

In (lonely) places as mountain caves, where the floor is even, free of pebbles or sand, where there are no disturbing noises from men or waterfalls, in places helpful to the mind and pleasing to the eyes, *yoga* is to be practised (mind is to be joined). Chapter II, Sloka 10.

In *Hatha yoga Pradipka* by Swatma Ram Swami the 12th Sloka of the first discourse directs :

The practiser of *Hatha yoga* should live alone in a small *Matha* situated in a place free from rocks, water and fire of the extent of a horos length, in a country ruled by a virtuous king, (inhabited) by people following Dharma, where he could get alms easily and which is free from disturbance.

Guru Nanak does not want the practiser of *Nam* resort to forests or mountain caves. In his dialogue with the *Siddhas* recorded in *Ramkali* measure Lohari Pa invites Guru Nanak to adopt such a life saying :

"Away from the markets and thoroughfares, we live among the shrubs and trees of forests, eat for food roots and fruits. An *Audhut* should always discourse on gnosis. Bathing in sacred places peace is obtained and no dirt remains attached to the mind. Lohari Pa, the disciple of Gorakh says this is the discipline of *yoga*." (7)

The Guru replies :

"In markets and thorough fares a man should remain alert and not let his mind run after others' women. Without the support of the Name the mind finds no rest, nor its hunger (for worldly goods) is appeased. The Guru has shown me the ship, the city and the home where I peacefully trade in truth. My sleep (of forgetfulness) is broken and I eat little and reflect on Reality, O Nanak."<sup>16</sup> (8)

God of Guru Nanak is formless, has no shape or features. A question is sometimes asked on what a man should fix his attention in *Jap* (recitation) or *Simrin* (remembrance). God has no form but the Guru says He is endowed with attributes and qualities. Uttering the Name by tongue our heart should concentrate on these qualities which are predicated of Him. "In the ambrosial hours of early morning reflect on His True Name and on His greatness (great attributes)." Those who reflect on *Nirbhau* (without fear) become fearless themselves.

The Name is a gift of God through the Guru. By our own attempts we cannot be imbued with it. As long as egoism (individuality) persists the Name is not enshrined in our heart.

The Guru says :

"I fall again and again at the feet of the Guru, through whom I have realised God inside.

When I reflect on Him God fills my heart, and seeing Him in my heart I dwell on Him. Utter the Name of God and thou will be redeemed. The jewel of Name is found though the grace of the Guru, ignorance is destroyed and light dawns.

But by mechanical utterance thy bonds will not break, thy egoism and doubt will not be destroyed.

When thou meetest the Guru, thy egoism will disappear and then thou will be of any account.

When the Name of God, the beloved of devotees, is enshrined in thy heart, the world will become an ocean of peace.

The Lord, dear to his devotees and the life of the world, will save thee by His beneficence if thy mind surrenders to that of the Guru.

He who grapples with his mind and accepts death (of the body) will receive the Lord. His desires will be absorbed in their source.

And then the life of the universe will shower his grace and his mind will be attuned to Him (God)."<sup>17</sup>

All the adjustments of mind which contribute to the attainment of harmony and balance are automatic and unconscious even where self-consciousness and introspection are highly developed.

(Tansley, page 285)

### **SURATI SHABAD YOGA**

In the lexicons compiled by competent lexographers the words *Surati* and *Shabad* have a number of meanings each. Instead of discussing which of them apply to these words in Guru Nanak's hymns we shall try to find their meanings from quotations in which they occur.

"When *Surti* awakens to the melody of the *Sabada* within, mind in the body of six nerve ganglions (*Chakras*) become detached (from sensual pleasures). My mind was absorbed in perennial music, and through Guru's instruction it was attuned to the True Name. Devotion to God bring bliss, O man ! Through Guru's instruction the Name tastes sweet and one is absorbed in it."<sup>18</sup> The word *Sabad* means *Gursabad* in this quotation which is clear from the following :

The *Sabada* of Guru tastes supremely sweet. This nectar I found inside me. He who tasted it reaches perfection. His mind gets satisfaction and body is comforted.<sup>19</sup>

Again

"Seeing Him (God) through Guru's word (*Sabada*) my mind was

reconciled, for none else can imbue it with love. Day and night He watcheth over living beings. He is the king."<sup>20</sup>

In his dialogue with the *Siddhas* in *Ramkali* the meaning of these two words is made clear. When Charpat asks Guru Nanak how to cross the impassable ocean of this *Samsara* he replies :

Just as a lotus flower remains detached in water and a duck's feathers do not get wet floating in a stream so one crosses the ocean of *Samsara* by keeping the *Surti* glued to *Sabada*. By enshrining the One in his heart he lives as if in solitude and cherishes no hopes amidst hopes.

Wear the ear-rings of listening without break to the *Sabada* inside and destroy egoism and mineness. Get rid of lust, anger and pride the Guru's word has made it clear. Make the thought that God is all-pervading thy wallet and patched coat, then says Nanak ! The one God grants salvation. The Lord is True and true is His glory. He who tests this teaching of the Guru will find it true.<sup>21</sup>

In the last lines of pauri 21 it is recorded :

He who destroys the poison of egoism through Guru's word (*Gursabad*) abides in his own house. Nanak is the slave of him who through the Word knows Him who has created the universe.

In the third and fourth lines of pauri 34 the word *Sabad* and *Gursabad* are used as synonyms.

He who dies (to self) through Guru's word will find the door to salvation. Without the Word all are lured away by other, reflect on it in thy mind.

When the *Siddhas* put him these questions in pauri 43, "How did life originate, of what creed is the sway in the present age? What is the gospel that keeps you detached? Explain to us your doctrine that *Sabada* makes one cross the ocean of *Samsara*," he replied :

Nanak speaks listen to it *O yogi*. Air (breath) originates life and the sway is of the creed of *Satguru*. The *Sabad* is the Guru and the *Surti* attuned to it is the disciple. The inexpressible gospel of the Lord keeps one detached. God is the Guru in all ages says Nanak. He who reflects on the gospel of *Sabad* through the Guru's instruction his fire of egoism is extinguished. 44

The split-eared *yogis* of Nath school were having this dialogue with Guru Nanak. They heard sounds when the prana (the vital force) pierced the *Anhat-Chakar* situated near the heart. The sound began with the sound resembling the tinkling of ornaments. Progressing further when he pierces the fifth *chakra* the sound like that of a kettle is heard.

Further on he hears the sound like that of a *mardal* (a sort of drum) and when he pierces the knot in *Agya Chakra*, situated in the midst of two brows he hears the sound of a flute and *vina*.<sup>22</sup> Guru Nanak nowhere in discoursing on *Surti-sabad* mentions such sounds. He was not a *Hatha yogin* and his attention was not fixed on such sounds. In *Japu pauri 5* he had clearly stated "the word of the Guru is the (*nadang*) music which the seers hear in their moments of ecstasy, the word of the Guru is the highest scripture (*Vedang*)." "By communion with the word we attain the vision unattainable."<sup>23</sup> The word *Sabada* used in connection with *Surti* does not mean any sort of sound, it means the Guru's word. Bhai Gurdas in his var 4 pauri 4 removes all doubts on this point.

"His (the Sikhs) *surti* is wide awake to the *Sabada*, he is deaf to every sound except that of Guru's word". Again in pauri 5 of Var 28 he says, "To know what it is to be the disciple of the Guru he in the company of *Sadhus* (who have practised the method) should learn to attune his *Surti* to the word."

"The Guru's word, deep as the ocean, is the Guru. Without the word, the world goes astray."<sup>24</sup>

This quotation removes all doubts regarding the meanings of '*Sabad*' in Gurbani.

The repetition of the Name is practised by the *sufi* saints and the Catholic branch of Christian also repeat such phrases as "*Ave Maria*." Dwelling on the same idea mind is attuned to it and a state of ecstasy ensues.

## REFERENCES

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2. *Var Suhi*, Pauri 16. Sloke 2
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5. *Siri*, *Ast.* 5.14
6. *Sorathi* 5.6
7. *Sorathi* 4.9
8. *Var Majh*, Pauri 5
9. *Asa* 2.11
10. *Wadhans* 2.1
11. *Parbhati*, *Ashtpadi* 4.2
12. *Japu*, Pauri 20



13. *Asa* 1.13
14. *Malar* 2.1.6
15. *Japu*, Pauri 4
16. *Japu*, Pauri 4
17. *Asa* 16
18. *Ramkali*, *Ashtpadi* 1.3
19. *Parbhati* 6.11
20. *Parbhati* 1.15
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22. *Hatha Yoga Pradipka*, Chapter 4.
23. *R.C.* Page 140
24. *Sorathi*, *Ast.* 8.1

## HUKAM—THE DIVINE ORDINANCE

*Gurbachan Singh Talib*

*Hukam* (Arabic : *Hukm*, order, command) has acquired a special central place in Sikh philosophical thought. It is found mentioned in the compositions of the holy Gurus in most of their hymns. It expresses the Divine Will, the Ordinance which regulates the universal system and the life of man—particularly the happenings in his life over which he has no control. It refers also to the inner force of the moral code and the system of retribution for man's doings in his life. In this term *Hukam*, Guru Nanak saw the secret of the Divine Will unfolding itself. He has consequently employed it on all occasions where his message to man is to see the hand of God behind the inexplicable happenings of life. By *Hukam* come the joy or sorrow which is man's destiny, the ordering of the future life and the attainment of liberation, or man's continuing in the painful circle of transmigration. A corollary of *Hukam* is for man to submit to the Divine Will without complaining or finding fault.

Along with *Hukam* another very important concept, also taken from the Arabic, is *Reza*. *Reza* like *Hukam*, is also Divine Will and these two terms are generally employed in the Gurus' teaching in conjunction. As an example may be cited the last line of the 1st stanza (Pauri) of *Japuji*, which in translation runs as follows :

'How may man purify himself? How demolish the wall of illusion?  
Saith Nanak : *This is brought about* by living in accordance with  
God's *Command* and *Will* :  
God's Will is recorded for man to be ever with him.'

In these lines, Command is the rendering of *Hukam* and will of *Reza*. In *Japuji* itself of stanza 27, at the close again these two terms occur in conjunction :

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*Note* : Page references are to Shabadarth of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. All renderings from Gurubani are by the present writer.

‘God acts as it pleases Him: man cannot Command Him to follow his own will;

Saith Nanak : He is the King of Kings;

For Man it is proper to live in accordance with His Will.

There are other terms employed in *Gurubani* which are equivalents of *Hukam*. One of these is *Furman* (*firman*) which is from the Persian. Another is *Bhana* (choice, desire) which is from Punjabi. Among Muslim *sufis*, who had established their centres of religious practice and propagation in Punjab two to three centuries before Guru Nanak's time. *Reza* was a popularly current term, and had passed into the thought and speech of the masses. It was, therefore, easily understood by the common folk. So was *Hukam*. Hence, in order to emphasize the religious duty of submission to the Divine Will, Guru Nanak employed these two terms so constantly in his message. In *sufistic* thought, *Reza* has a twofold meaning : (a) The attitude of submission on Man's part to the Divine Will and (b) the Divine Will itself. It is in the latter of the two senses that *Reza* is employed Sikh thought. *Hukam* (*Hukm*) is not directly employed in the Koran, but its derivative *Hakim* (One who commands, i.e. the Ruler) is used in the phrase *Ahkam-ul-Hakimin* (The Supreme Ruler) for God. Another Arabic word for command is *amar* (*amr*). That also is employed in *Gurubani*.

The basic idea implicit in *Hukam* and *Reza* is the imperative nature, the supremacy of the Divine Will and the duty of man to submit to such will, whether joy comes to him or sorrow. Even in the face of impending death at the hands of tyrants, in under-going martyrdom, the Guru's Sikhs felt themselves bound to accept these happenings to *Hukam* and *Reza* and to meet their suffering in the spirit of resignation. While the terms *Hukam*, *Reza* and *Furman* come from Muslim sources and from the Arabic or Persian languages, in Indian thought to the idea of submission to the divine will is paramount, especially in the practice of *Bhakti*. When in the Gita the Lord calls upon man to submit to Him the fruit of his action and to accept success or failure uncomplainingly, what is being emphasized is the need for man to submit to the Divine Will.

The suffering of life had become greatly accentuated in India in the medieval age with the various forces of tyranny prevalent under the state system of the *Pathans*, and later the *Mughals*. Was man to

forget God or to rebel against Him in such an age? What was man's duty? Clearly, while he must ennoble his own life through prayer and devotion, he must at the same time not grow bitter. Suffering being inevitable, man must bear an attitude of seeing the Hand of God in all happenings. Through such attitude of *Reza* alone could suffering be overcome. In this age to the injustices of the system of exploitation of the people by the landlords and rulers was added religious persecution. The sufferings of the people had become *tenfold* : sufferings there must be, till God in His Will would find a means to end it. In the meantime men of God must suffer through and not bend to the will of tyrants. Whatever suffering came, thy must bear it in the spirit of resignation, and whether through death or through suffering under-gone must become martyrs.

To sustain their faith through such trials they must realize that the Divine Will is inscrutable and works out its own purposes in ways which man cannot understand. All that man can do is to be certain in the faith that God is altogether and wholly good; that His Will is good and therefore even suffering and pain undergone in His way are holy and are not without meaning. It is this faith which underlies the concept of *Hukam* and calls from the man duty of submission. It is in this spirit that Guru Arjun and Guru Tegh Bahadur and countless other martyrs faced death. It is with this faith that Guru Gobind Singh faced all the hard trials of his life. The underlying concept behind all such experiences is the faith in *Hukam* and *Reza*. It is the realization of *Hukam* that underlies Guru Arjan's lines. (*Asa M. V.* 93, Page 394) Sweet is Thy Will :

Nanak begs only for the wealth of the Name.

There is a Divine purpose in everything. Man cannot know the Divine purposes. He is only a drop in the ocean, a tiny fish in the vast sea. For him therefore, the sovereign duty is to submit. It is irreligious and impious to assert one's ego in the face of the Divine Will. Hence the person whose mind is not conditioned to religious faith is called *Man-Mukh* (Egoist.) On the impropriety of man assenting his own will in the face of the Divine Will, a few texts may be cited from *Gurubani*.

*From Japuji :*

All are subject to God's Ordinance; none is exempt from it.

If man were to recognize its operation, he would not assert ego.

(Stanza 2, at the end.)

What pleases Thee is alone good and holy.

(Refrain to stanzas 17, 18, 19)

All happens as He wills it; the ignorant in colossal folly presume  
to issue commands.

(Var Malar 11, page 1282)

None can say on whom the creator bestows any gift; He orders  
everything; fools think they are the masters.

(Var Sarang 10, page 1241)

All creatures carry with them what is destined for each;

All shall be decreed as their actions shall specify.

The ignorant alone command and will.

Nanak, the Eternal is a treasury of noble attributes.

(Basant M. 1, 4.3., page 1169)

All happens as He wills; Nanak, what is man?

(Asa M. 1, Ashtpadiyan 7, page 417)

By Ordinance is man born and dies;

He who understands the Ordinance, is merged with the Eternal.

Nanak, the Eternal is so dear to the heart;

Through His grace alone may one do good deeds.

(Maru Solahe 5.1., page 1025)

The God-inspired man alone understands the Ordinance and is  
merged with it.

Through Ordinance is man born and he dies.

The whole visible creation is in consequence of the Ordinance.

Through the Ordinance are created the three worlds and through  
the Ordinance does God assume His power.

Through the Ordinance is the Bull bearing the earth on his head.

Through the Ordinance are created air, water and the heavens.

Through the Ordinance is *Shiva* lodged in the house of *Shakti*,

And so the play of the universe appeared.

Through the Ordinance are the heavens spread;

And all creatures of water, land and air created.

Through the Ordinance does one get breath and food;

Through the Ordinance is man given sight.

He who submits to the Ordinance, finds the Portal, and is merged

into the Eternal.

The Ordinance kept the thirty-six Ages in the Void.

Through the Ordinance are mystics and saints engaged in meditation.

He the Master who holds the leading-strings of the Universe,  
Is the Lord of Forgiveness and Deliverance.

(*Ibid* 16, page 1037)

Two other related concepts along with *Hukam* may be mentioned. One of these is *Kudrat* (Qudrat) which is also from the Arabic and literally means power, might. *Kudrat* is inclusive of *Hukam* which is its operative form. *Kudrat* and *Hukam* are the underlying Law of the universe, which is moral in character. This law upholds Right and destroys Evil. As is constantly reiterated in *Gurubani*, in the long run falsehood (i.e. Evil) will be destroyed and Truth (i.e. Right) will endure. This inevitability of the triumph of Right sustains faith and makes sorrow and suffering appear only to be temporary phases in the experience of the self, which ultimately must merge into the universal self (*Paramatma*) and rise to a state which is above joy and sorrow. The Divine Law thus is not an arbitrary fiat or command but the unalterable law wherein only that which is Right prevails and all that happens is only a manifestation of this process. Man in his limited view may not be able to see this Reality, but the spiritually-enlightened person, the Guru or *Brahm-Giani* sees this law and makes others aware of its operation. Thus, tyrants are destroyed and their apparent shows of power are of no avail to them. What destroys them is the force of the Divine Law which does not brook success to evil. Several texts in *Gurubani* testify to this.

In the measure *Sorath*, says Guru Nanak :

Those with remparts and forts, and sounds of pump,

Who thought the sky too small for them,

Were in the end dragged about in halters.

(*Sorath M. I.I.*, page 595)

Their hosts, drums and fine portals they shall be forced to forsake;  
All are dust, and in the end have become dust.

(*Var Sarang* 17, page 1244)

In *Var Asa* : 'If God turns away his glance of favour, Kings become blades of grass.'

In the Hymns in *Babarvani* similarly, the fall of the great and powerful is recounted. They fall because of the Moral Law which brings about the fall of those who had forsaken the path of virtue.

Another idea related to *Hukam* is that of Grace for which several terms are employed in *Gurubani*. One of these is *Karam* (Arabic), another is *Mehar* (Persian). *Kirpa* (Kripa) from the Sanskrit, and *Prasad* are used very frequently. *Prasad* occurs in the Basic Creed called *Mul Mantra*, wherein it is affirmed that all Enlightenment comes by Divine Grace.

Grace is included with *Hukam* or the Law along with the idea of Retribution. In *Gurubani*, it is asserted that man's destiny is made by his actions. In *Japuji*, it is said 'Reap what you sow yourself' (Stanza 20). Guru Arjan says in *Bara Maha (Majh)* 'One reaps what one sows'. This implies that man cannot dispense with the need to do good. Without that his destiny must be eternal suffering.

But *Karam*, *Mehar*, *Prasad* (Grace) override this law. Through devotion, prayer and humility the gift of Grace might arrive. Actions alone are not enough to gain liberation. In *Japuji*, it is said, 'Through good actions comes the human incarnation; through grace is reached the Door of Liberation.' (Stanza 4). Again, in *Japuji* occurs this 'Liberation from the bonds of transmigration comes by the Divine Will : More than this man cannot say.' (Stanza 25)

Grace remains the last mystery which as the Guru says, man cannot solve. The Guru has given an analogy to illustrate this point. Just as one small spark of fire may burn away huge stocks of firewood, so acts of devotion and love of God may annul the consequences of sins and omissions. Devotion through which Divine Grace comes, is man's duty, of which he is constantly reminded in *Gurubani*. Man must devote himself to God, pray to Him and supplicate for Grace, in the hope that thus it will descend on him. The texts in which Grace is affirmed as being the fruit of sincere devotion are these :

God's Name is my lamp; suffering its oil;

Its light has sucked up this oil;

Thus am I made free of *Yama*.

People! Let no one think this is a boast;

For huge heaps of firewood, a tiny spark of fire is enough.

(*Asa M. I.* 32, page 358)

Brother, you may gather a huge load of fuel,  
Put a small bit of fire into it; it will all burn.  
Thus, with God's Name finding place in the heart for an instant,  
Union with Him may come about.

*(Sorath M. I, Ashtpadiyan 4, page 637)*

Gathering a huge quantity of fuel,  
A small spark I put into it.  
In the same way, should the holy Lord be lodged in the heart,  
All suffering will vanish.

*(Var Jaisari M.V.5, page 706)*



## GURU NANAK'S CONCEPT OF SAHAJ

*Dewan Singh*

The concept of *Sahaj* is central and pivotal in Guru Nanak's mystical thought. It relates to the highest spiritual state humanly attainable and has thus deepest connotations attached to it.

Though outcome of a most advanced and recondite experience within the innermost sanctuary of the soul, the ordinary meaning of *Sahaj* is 'just what it should be' or 'just normal'. In other words, a simple human proposition, that a man should become a man *par excellence*; a real man; no adhesions, no defaults, no accretions, no deviations. But this paradoxical word *Sahaj* does not go with mere 'saying' or verbal expression. It is an actuality, a real human state, a tangible-workable human achievement.

Bearing in mind the baffling nature of this term, it can safely be said that the concept of *Sahaj* belongs to the realm of 'Esoteric-mysticism', in as much as the meaning of *Sahaj* is invariably associated with its manifestative aspect or its expressive quality which, in figurative terms, we call *Anhad Sabad*.<sup>1</sup> Thus both the mystical content and its configuration are essentially linked together in our ubiquitous reality.

It is only the experiment who can apprehend these two unitive states within his soul, without being able to express them because these are entirely ineffable realizations.<sup>2</sup> Guru Nanak himself, having experienced directly the blissful union with God and the concomitant divine manifestations attending such Beatitude, has mystically expressed these visions in symbolical language, incorporating and using *esoteric* terms already current in *Vedanta* or *Yoga* mysticism and in higher Buddhism,<sup>3</sup> investing them with new meanings.

As Niharranjan Ray says :

"...in whichever manner one seeks to describe the *Sahaj* experience, its real nature must elude understanding in humanly communicable language. The articulation of an experience which was essentially a

mystical one and hence, according to Guru Nanak himself, was incapable of being translated in communicable terms, was indeed beyond human expression, had necessarily to be in traditional mystical terms made current and somewhat understandable by his predecessors belonging to various mystic orders of *sants* and *sadhus*, and in well-known traditional symbols and images that had some meaning, howsoever vague and generalized, to those whom his words were addressed to."<sup>4</sup>

In order to consider the concept of *Sahaj* in its mystical connotation, it would be useful first to study its etymological meaning. *Sahaj* is originally a Sanskrit word which means 'having been born together' (just as human 'twins')<sup>5</sup> and thus something inwardly perceived or intuited alongwith one's birth as a human being—a sort of indwelling mystical principle of divine perception given to man as his birthright and therefore, a natural and effortless heritage of *divinity* ingrained in humanity.<sup>6</sup>

Properly speaking, *sahaj* is the very 'mysticality' (to use a new term) of religion. It is the acceptance of inwardness and 'intuitionism' as the true basis of religion, to the negation of all ritualistic externalities.<sup>7</sup>

In Guru Nanak's thought, *sahaj* comes to imply the acceptance of *Hukam* as the first cardinal principle of *Sikhism*.<sup>8</sup> *Sahaj* in this meaning would be the mystical state of a man who has accepted the divine will (*Hukam*, *Bhana*, *Raza*). *Sahaj*, thus, is the highest spiritual state attainable in *Sikhism*. It is the highest bliss.

Another writer on Guru Nanak defining *sahaj* says :

"The word '*sahaj*' means natural fulfilment. Just as vegetables cooked over a slow fire retain their flavour, in the same way gradual and voluntary discipline of the mind and body will bring out the essential goodness inherent in the individual."<sup>9</sup>

In the meaning expressed above *Sahaj* connotes a natural slowness and steadiness required for perfect action. Haste makes waste, has been truly said, *Sahaj* is the opposite of inordinate haste, *Sahaj* is compactness and self-sufficiency, while haste is flippancy and inner weakness. A sure man is the 'poised' man. In this anthropomorphic sense (as distinct from the mystical one, discussed earlier), *Sahaj* would mean equipoise, equanimity and equilibrium. It may be called "balanced perspicacity" or *sambuddhata*, in the psychological sense.<sup>10</sup>

All true balance and true actions (which may be called *Sahajkaram*,

as distinct from the self-willed actions) engender aesthetic as well as spiritual pleasure, while spiritual fulfilment produces infinite bliss.

*Sahaj* which is "the state of enlightenment achieved through self-discipline"<sup>11</sup> has been generally accepted to be "the ultimate goal which the religious and spiritual discipline laid down by Guru Nanak was supposed to lead to."<sup>12</sup> Hence this term has been used to denote the ineffable union with God. Various expressions have been current as synonymous with *Sahaj*, such as *Sunn-samadh*, *turia-avastha*,<sup>13</sup> *chautha pad*, *amar pad*, *param pad*, *maha-sukh*, *param anand*, *dasam duar*, *anhad nad*, *sach Khand*, *jiwan-mukti* and so on.<sup>14</sup> The term *sahaj samadh* has also been used by Kabir and the Sikh Gurus.<sup>15</sup>

All this terminology connected with *Sahaj* was commonly used by all the *Nirgun-Sampradaya* saints, Kabir, Namdev, Dadu and others, alongwith Guru Nanak, having borrowed it from the *sahajayani* Buddhists (who in their turn inherited it from the *Mahayana-vajrayana* Buddhist tradition) and also from *Tantric Hathayoga* and the *Nathpanthi-Kanphata*. Yogis with whom Guru Nanak came into direct and close contact. The *Sahajiya Vaishnavas* and *Bauls* of Bengal also adopted this esoteric terminology.<sup>16</sup>

The patent meaning of *Sahaj* has been the abnegation of duality and the perception of unity in God as well as the creation. This unitive state or the *Sunn* state which means Vacuity or Devoidness,<sup>17</sup> is also the primordial state of the *Nirgun Brahm* Himself. Mohan Singh Uberoi describes the Sikh *Sahaja Yoga* as 'unification with Self through cultivation of a state of natural, easy Self-Hold, Self-Rest.' Again : "*Sunn* is a state in which there is no movement, in the receptacle, of any type, no sound, no wind, no object or objectivity, the subject God, is there as the container, the presence."<sup>18</sup>

Guru Nanak has copiously used esoteric terms and expressions such as *sunm*, *shiv-shakti*, *trikuṭi*, *unman*, *sas-ghar-sur*, *bajar-kapat*, *ira-pingla-sukhmana*, *ajapa-jap*, *dasamduar*, *dhundhukar niralam*, *sache amerapur*, *sachi nagari*, *bij-mandar*-, *sunm kala*, *satsar*, *panch-sabad*, *akul niranjan*, *purakh-atit*, *gagnantar dhanakh*, *sunm-samadh*, *bis-ikis*, *dubmue-vin pani*, *surat-dhun*, *nijghar*, *guptibani*, *anhat sunm* and *surat-sabad* in all his compositions, specially in Ragas, *Ramkali* and *Maru*. These are purely mystical terms common to all Indian religions.

As Niharranjan Ray observes,<sup>19</sup> Guru Nanak's use of these *tantric* and *yogic* terms does not logically follow that he actually practised or inculcated their practice among his followers, since he has used them only as figures of speech or technical esoteric terms which were current and handy for use and were generally understood among advanced mystical orders of his time. He had actually many discussions during his travels and at Kartarpur with *Yogis*, *Sadhus* and ascetics of various mystical cults and denominations.

Guru Nanak, in fact, had his own mystical message to convey to humanity and it was original with him and had no conceptual reference to the mystical philosophies of *saivites*, *vaishnavites*, *yogis* and even to Kabir, Dadu, Namdev and others, though many of them were accepted as allied co-mystics and their compositions included in the *Adi-Granth* more with a view to illustration and elaboration than to identification and syncretism.

The achievement of *Sahaj-avastha* in the form of *maha-sukha* or *jiwan-mukti* which was the ultimate goal of all the mystical cults using esoteric terms concurrently during Guru Nanak's times, was to Guru Nanak a matter of inner discipline and direct experiential contact with divine Reality. Mere esoteric niceties or intricacies, specially of Tantric Yoga were quite alien to his mystic temperament which was fundamentally dynamic, ethical and synthetic.

N. Ray remarks in this context :

"God-experience is an inner experience; one must therefore, cleanse and purify one's inner being. How does one do it? Guru Nanak's clear answer is, by loving devotion and adoration of God and by endless repetition and remembering of His Name, *Nam simran*"<sup>20</sup>

Summing up, this eminent scholar says :

"Guru Nanak's position and statements are precise, clear and unequivocal and their ethical import and socio-religious significance deep and wide."<sup>21</sup>

Guru Nanak's mystic thought is easily distinguishable from the *Natha-panthi* and *Kanphata Yogi* cults, as also from *Tantrism*, *Vaishnavism* and *Shaivism*, though a general fallacy exists to equate or identify it with Kabir's mysticism. But as Mcleod has lucidly discussed, much of Kabir's mystical jargon remains obscure and personal whereas Guru Nanak's postulation especially of the mystic path and discipline is clearer and more cogent than that of Kabir.<sup>22</sup>

Concluding his analysis of Guru Nanak's mystical contribution to Indian religious thought as represented by Sant Tradition (i.e. *Nirgun-samparadaya*-tradition), Mcleod says :<sup>23</sup>

"The system developed by Guru Nanak is essentially a re-working of the Sant pattern, a reinterpretation which compounded experience and profound insight with a quality of coherence and a power of effective expression."

There is much inconsistency and incoherence in Kabir's thought, as Ray observes, from which Guru Nanak's mysticism is absolutely free, with the result that whereas it is difficult if not impossible to construct a theology out of what Kabir says, it is not so with Guru Nanak. "He was also a mystic, but his mysticism was limited to the final goal of *sahaj* experience which at the ultimate analysis was a mystical, ineffable, unanalysable, inexpressible experience."<sup>24</sup>

Another eminent writer observes :

"The *Sahaja Yoga*, according to the Guru, consists in subduing the mind through the grace of the Guru and in the extinction of all troubles and ills in the company of the Guru and the saints. This is the Bhakti Yoga of the Guru."<sup>25</sup>

Among the more technical esoteric (Tantric) terms may be included the '*Chhat-chakra*' or the six nerve-plexuses, the *kundalini*, the *sahansar-dal kanwal*, the *sas.sur* complex, the *dasamduar*, the opening of *bajar-kapat* or *trikuti*. These are the well-known yogic terms which Guru Nanak adopted and reinterpreted to suit his own mystic realization. They are, thus, of illustrative value.

The idea of the immersion of 'sun' in the house of 'moon' (*sas ghar sur samauna*)<sup>26</sup> is typically mystical and has been adopted by Guru Nanak to express the subservience of the creative energy (called *shakti*—the female symbol) to the spiritual element (called *shiva*—the male symbol). The sun and moon also stand for the right and left nerve channels (called *ira* and *pingla*, respectively) of the Hathayoga.<sup>27</sup>

Connecting the allied states of *Sahaj* and *Anhad* N. Ray says :

"Apart from the characteristics of peace and tranquillity, of wonderment and bliss and of ineffable radiance by which one recognized the *sahaj* state of being, Guru Nanak recognized another, that of *anhad sabad*, an unstruck sound which he used to experience within himself as that ultimate state of being."<sup>28</sup>

While *sahaj* is the highest blissful state attainable by man as a

result of mystic discipline and realization, *anhad* is the mystical expression of that radiant state in terms of divine music esoterically heard within the soul and which the experient only knows in his own experience and cannot describe in human language.

Guru Nanak has treated the concept of *sahaj* in its varied aspects, as is evident from the following references from his poetry :

1. We come by *sahaj* and left by *Hukam*; Nanak, there is eternal obedience (to God).<sup>29</sup>
2. "By hearing the Name, one attains *sahaj* contemplation."<sup>30</sup>
3. "By hearing Guru's word, one attains *sahaj* contemplation."<sup>31</sup>
4. "Those who apprehended Him, they recognized the *Sahaj*. When I pondered over this, my mind was appeased."<sup>32</sup>
5. "One who met the Lord in *Sahaj*, was accepted. He has neither death nor rebirth."<sup>33</sup>
6. "In fear one found the Fearless. Then he entered the house of *Sahaj*."<sup>34</sup>
7. "To see Nature, to hear *Gurbani*, and to utter your true Name. Thus the treasure of honour was filled and we got *Sahaj* contemplation."<sup>35</sup>
8. "O Yogi, consider the essence with *Sahaj*. In this way you will not be reborn in this world."<sup>36</sup>

### REFERENCES

1. For *Anhad*, see Mohan Singh, *Sikh Mysticism*, p. 47.
2. Cf. Guru Arjan, *Sukhmani*, 16, AG, 285. "Absorbed in wonder (*vismad*), they become wonder itself. Those who know Him, enjoy the bliss."
3. Cf. Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, pp. 191f.; Niharranjan Ray, *Sikh Gurus and The Sikh Society*. pp. 125, 127; and Prem Prakash Singh, *Guru Nanak and Nirgundhara*, pp. 82-83.
4. *Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society*, p.120.
5. See MK, 103, Bhai Kahn Singh has given thirteen meanings of the term, but the import which dominantly emerges is that of 'something natural, indwelling, spontaneous and inborn.'
6. Cf. Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Guru Nanak di Vichardhara*, (Punjabi), p. 415, for etymology from : "*Sah jayte iti sahaj*." See also Niharranjan Ray, *Op. cit.* p. 123.
7. Cf. Niharranjan Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
8. Cf. Guru Nanak, *Japuji*, 1, AG., 1. "To walk in the umbrage of Divine Will, as, -says Nanak, ordained in the spirit itself." (*Hukam rajai chalana*

*Nanak likhia na*).

9. G.S. Mansukhani, *Guru Nanak World Teacher*, p. 87., f.n. 2, with reference to Khushwant Singh, *History of Sikhs*, Vol. I, p. 45.
10. See James Drever, *A Dictionary of Psychology*, p. 209, 'Perspicacity is acute or clear understanding.'
11. G.S. Talib, *Guru Nanak : His Personality and Vision*, p. 201.
12. Niharranjan Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 117. Cf. also J.S. Grewal *Guru Nanak in History*, p. 273.
13. J.S. Grewal, *Loc. Cit.*
14. Niharranjan Ray, *op. cit.*, pp. 118 f.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 122, 127.
17. "The Supreme ultimate Devoidness (*Mahasunn*) which the fifth *sunn* of Tibetan mystics and *Sunyatita* of the Saivites." Mohan Singh Oberoi, *Sikh Mysticism* p. 20, Cf. Paul Brunton calls it "the void" or "the Supernal Empty". *Spiritual Crisis of Man*, p. 132.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
19. *Op. Cit*, pp. 132, ff.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
22. Mcleod, *Op. Cit.* pp. 150, 157 Cf. also Niharranjan *Op. Cit.* p. 58.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
24. *Op. Cit.*, p. 59.
25. S.S. Kohli, *Philosophy of Guru Nanak*, p. 72, Cf. Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Guru Nanak di Vichardhara*, p. 444.
26. Guru Nanak, *Maru Dhakhni*, AG, 1033 and *Maru AG*, 1041.
27. Cf. Niharranjan Ray, *Op. Cit.* p. 128 f. and Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Guru Nanak di Vichardhara*, p. 400. As Ray says, the male principle is symbolized by the male sperm (*bind*), which the female principle is ever eager to consume.
28. *Op. Cit.* p. 119, Cf. also Mcleod, *op. Cit.* p. 225. Mcleod calls *Sahaj* as 'the ineffable radiance beyond the *dasam duar*.'
29. *Siddh Gosht*, 3, AG., 938.
30. *Japji*, 10, AG., 3.
31. *Siddh-Gosht*, 41, AG., 942.
32. *Gauri Guarari*, AG., 221.
33. *Dhanasari*, AG., 686.
34. *Sorath*, AG., 599.
35. *Basant*, AG., 1168.
36. *Prabhati*, AG., 1328.

## GURU NANAK'S CONCEPT OF GURU

*Surinder Singh Kohli*

The Guru-cult in India can be traced back to the Vedic period. In Yajur Veda itself, there is mention of consecration (*Diksha*), which a pupil obtains by a deep personal contact with the teacher. This consecration "is not merely a formal initiation.....it is the path of transition from darkness to light, from humanity to divinity, from untruth to truth."<sup>1</sup> In Upanishads, the teacher-disciple (*Guru Shishya*) relationship becomes quite distinct. "The teacher is represented as indispensable to knowledge in Kath, 2.8 : 'Apart from the teacher there is no access here.'<sup>2</sup> With the rise of various *Bhakti* Cults and the emergence of *Bhakti* Movement in India the Guru became the pivot of the spiritual world. The third chapter of the *The Gospel of Narada* is especially written about the Teacher and the Disciple. In his Introductory note to this chapter, Duncan Greenless has given the crux of this chapter in the following words; "....The Guide must be one who live upon....Love and can awaken it in the pilgrim's heart; those who lead to other goals...such as worldly wealth or fame, psychic powers, fleshly pleasures, mere ethical virtues, or self centered 'liberation' from desire and illusion—mislead the soul; no true Guides are they, but deceivers to be avoided like a plague. The real Guru is he who step by step assimilates his pupil to the Lord through surrender and loving service and aspiring contemplation; indeed, the real Guru is himself an incarnation of that Love and Wisdom which is the Lord."<sup>3</sup> In *Tantrika* Culture, the place of *Guru* and *diksha* is of vital importance. "*Gurutattva* may, and often does, operate through a human body. But the *Shastra*, seizing upon the kernel of the thing, forbids the *sadhaka* to look upon the *guru* as human. He is a form and embodiment of God power."<sup>4</sup>

Kabir and Guru Nanak were the high priests of Indian mysticism during the *Bhakti* Movement. In the religious teaching of both Kabir (1440—1518) and of Guru Nanak (1469—1539), we find strong



evidence of the firm hold that the doctrine of Guru had on the minds of men of their age. Both of them combine in themselves deep philosophical insight with heights of mystical experience. According to R.D. Ranade, Kabir surpasses other Hindi saints in his description of the spiritual Teacher with his moral, mystical, and social qualities.<sup>5</sup> But Guru Nanak is no less emphatic about the supremacy of the *Guru* in the spiritual domain.

The Primal Guru, according to Guru Nanak, is God Himself. There dwells in the heart of each one, the Divine (*Antaryamin*), who is the innate Guide.<sup>6</sup> There are not a few instances of the yogins, saints and mystics who have had no Guru save this inner Guide and by following Him, they have arrived at their destination.<sup>7</sup> Guru Nanak has clearly stated that he had met his Guru, the Unfathomable *Para Barahman Paraml Ishvara*.<sup>8</sup> The one *Hari* also pervades as Guru and Nanak had loved Him.<sup>9</sup>

We find the use of both the words *Guru* and *Satguru* in the verses of Guru Nanak. Both of them have been used for the same spiritual preceptor. Ordinarily, in Indian tradition, two types of Guru have been mentioned : 1. *Shiksha Guru*, who expounds and teaches the *Shashtra* and 2. *Diksha-Guru*, who initiates the seeker in the spiritual domain and guides him till the attainment of the destination. The second type of Guru may be called *Satguru* (True Guru), who may be differentiated from *Asatguru* or the false Guru. In *Kīlarnava Tantra*, six kinds of Gurus have been mentioned : *Preraka* (who inspires for the adoption of practical discipline), *Suhaka* (who enlightens the seeker regarding *Sadhana*), *Vachaka* (who explains the objective), *Darshaka* (who exhibits the objective), *Shikshaka* (who teaches the discipline) and *Bodhaka* (who enlightens and illuminates the seeker). According to the *Tantra*; the last kind is "the prime cause of which the rest are the effects; without the lamp of knowledge lighted by the *Bodhaka*, all other steps remain without consequence."<sup>10</sup>

When Guru Nanak uses the words *Guru* or *Satguru*, he means *Diksha Guru* and *Bodhak Guru*. According to him the Guru has twin functions to perform : 1. the initiation into the Name or the Word and 2. imparting the knowledge about the Divine.<sup>11</sup>

The Guru says :

1. By meeting such a Guru the base metal is transformed into

gold, He gives the nectar of the Name and the infructuous peregrinations (of the disciple) cease.

(*Maru M. 1, Adi Granth, 990*)

2. The water is contained in the pitcher; the pitcher cannot exist without water,  
Similarly the mind is controlled by knowledge and there can be no knowledge without the Guru.

(*Var Asa M. 1., Adi Granth, 469*)

The Guru is not meant for chosen people. He is meant for the whole of humanity.<sup>12</sup> He shows the way to every one without any distinction of birth, sex, caste, colour and creed. Ordinarily mortals are transformed to gods by him, in no time.<sup>13</sup>

Guru Nanak says :

I adore that (Guru) who shows the Path  
I adore that (Guru) who recites the Word  
I adore that (Guru) who unites (with the Lord)

(*Gauri M. 1., Adi Granth p. 226*).

The following moral and spiritual characteristics of the Guru have been mentioned by Guru Nanak is his *bani* :

1. There is no other benefactor like *Satguru*.<sup>14</sup>
2. He gives knowledge about Truth and only Truth.<sup>15</sup>
3. The seeker can have access to him by the grace of the Lord.<sup>16</sup>
4. Without him none can realise the Lord.<sup>17</sup>
5. The Lord has put His own Self into the True Guru.<sup>18</sup>
6. Final emancipation is obtained by meeting the True Guru.<sup>19</sup>
7. The attachment is effaced by the Guru.<sup>20</sup>
8. The seeker remembers the Lord on meeting the True Guru.<sup>21</sup>
9. The Guru gives the antimony of knowledge.<sup>22</sup>
10. Through the help of the True Guru, the seeker crosses the ocean of *samsara*.<sup>23</sup>
11. On meeting the ture Guru the ego vanishes and the vices disappear.<sup>24</sup>
12. On meeting the True Guru, the disciple repeats the Name.<sup>25</sup>
13. The Guru puts the seeker on the right path.<sup>26</sup>
14. The Guru is like the tree of Contentment whose flower is Dharma (righteousness) and whose fruit is knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

15. Without the Guru, the door of the mind cannot be opened, because none other has key the for it.<sup>28</sup>
16. There is no other god or goddess except the True Guru. He is the confluence of all of them.<sup>29</sup>
17. The Guru dispels the darkness of ignorance.<sup>30</sup>
18. Without the service of the Guru, there can be no *Bhakti*.<sup>31</sup>

In all the hymns of Guru Nanak, the central theme is the remembrance of the Name of the Lord, therefore, in order to accomplish this objective, the grace of the Guru is considered essential. Without the Guru, the human birth goes waste. It is only through human body that a *Jiva* can realise *Brahman*. But only the *Gurmukh* (the dedicated disciple) knows the significance of human birth. If the True Guru wills his mind and body are imbued with love. He makes the best use of his life and leaves the world with merchandise of truth. With the Word of the Guru and sacred fear in the mind, he is received warmly in the Court of the Lord.<sup>32</sup> In the *Vishvasara Tantra*, the efficacy of human life has been depicted in the following words : "There is no birth like upto the human birth. Both *Devas* and *Pitris* desire it. For the *Jiva* the human body is of all bodies the most difficult to come by. For this it is said that human birth is attained with extreme difficulty...Of the *Jiva*'s eighty-four lakhs of births the human birth is the most fruitful. In no other birth can *Jiva* acquire knowledge of the truth. Human birth is the stepping-stone to the path of liberation."<sup>33</sup>

During his discussions with the *yogis* of his day, Guru Nanak gave a complete picture of his discipline, which can only be practised with the help of the Guru. Whereas in the *Natha* Cult, "for the attainment of the state of neutrality (*Sahaja*), a *Yogi*, following his Guru's instructions, has to check the downward flow of the semen, hold up the breath and stabilize the mind,"<sup>34</sup> the disciple of Guru Nanak has to ascend the spiritual zenith through the Name-Culture following his Guru's instructions. The Guru says in *Siddh Goshta* :

Without the Guru, one goes astray and transmigrates,  
 Without the Guru, the effort becomes useless,  
 Without the Guru, the mind serves furiously,  
 Without the Guru, One is not satisfied in *maya*,  
 Without the Guru, the snake of vices stings, killing midway,

Without the Guru, one loses at every step, saith Nanak.

(Pauri 38)

Without the service of *Satguru*, there can be no *yoga*,

Without meeting the *Satguru*, none gets final emancipation.

Without meeting the *Satguru*, the Name is not obtained.

Without meeting the *Satguru*, one experiences great misery.

Without meeting the *Satguru*, one remains in severe darkness of  
ego.

Without the Guru, one dies wasting his life, saith Nanak.

(Pauri 70)

Guru Nanak says that no other action is superior to the remembrance of the Name of the Lord.<sup>35</sup> The True Guru himself practises, whatever he teaches. He enables the disciple to abide in God. He shows the real home of the Lord to the disciple in the house of his heart.<sup>36</sup> In this house the disciple experiences extreme ecstasy, while listening to the unstruck melody.<sup>37</sup> Though Guru Nanak has used the *Yogic* terminology, the interpretation is his own. His path of the Name is quite different from the *Yogis*. He makes his self-consciousness (*Surt*) enter *Shabda*.<sup>38</sup> This is the reason why his *Yoga* is called *Surt-Shabad Yoga*. The True Guru sees the light of the Lord everywhere.<sup>39</sup>

Several analogies are found in the *bani* of Guru Nanak regarding the True Guru and his functions. The Guru has been described as an ocean, which is full of gems. The saints pick up these gems of virtues for their food.<sup>40</sup> There is no holy place like the Guru.<sup>41</sup> He is a tank of contentment.<sup>42</sup> He has also been called a tree of contentment with flower of righteousness and fruit of knowledge.<sup>43</sup> He is a banker.<sup>44</sup> He is like river with crystal clear water capable of washing away all the dirt of vices.<sup>45</sup> He is like a tree of nectar with fruit full of ambrosia.<sup>46</sup> He is a benefactor, a house of snow (connoting peace and patience) and a lamp for the three worlds.<sup>47</sup> He is like sandalwood which fills the vegetation with its fragrance.<sup>48</sup>

In the age of Guru Nanak, the traditional Guru had become mechanical and corrupt, therefore he has been described as the "blind Guru", "Ignorant Guru" or "Unsound Guru". Such Gurus went abegging.<sup>49</sup> The disciples used to set the music and the Gurus danced to its tunes. It was a mere sport for the populace. They used to sing only the stories of Rama and Krishan.<sup>50</sup> The Guru says :

1. If the Guide become blind, how can he show the Path ? He is robbed by his conceited intellect, how can he recognise the way ?

(*Suhi Chhant* M. 1, p. 765)

2. The disciples; who have an ignorant Guru, cannot secure a position of respect.

(*Sri Raga* M. I, p. 58)

3. Being ignorant, if one shows the Path, he misleads the whole company, saith Nanak,  
He will be punished in the Lord's Court; such will be the fate of this Guide.

(*Var Majh* M. 1, p. 140)

4. The final beatitude will not be attained through an unsound Guru.

(*Ramkali* M. I, *Dakhni Omkar*, p. 932)

*Brahman* is the object of supreme quest and in this holy objective, the Guru plays a significant role. No logic can help us in any way. Only the grace of the True Guru lifts us into the spiritual domain. Through the Grace of the Lord, we meet the Guru and through the grace of the Guru we meet the Lord. The Name of the Word of the Guru enlightens our path, therefore the word of the Guru has been called the Guru himself and the self-consciousness (*Surti*) its disciple.<sup>51</sup> The Word or *bani* of the Guru contains the spirit of the Guru and from it, the disciple obtains the required guidance.<sup>52</sup>

The Word is the sun in all the four ages and the devotee concentrates on it. This *maya*-ridden mind is saved by such concentration.<sup>53</sup> None gets the final emancipation without the True Word. Without knowing the mystery of the Word, the death comes repeatedly.<sup>54</sup> In this world, the concentration on the word is the best of the actions. Without it there is the darkness of attachment. With it the Name resides in the heart and the final beatitude is achieved.<sup>55</sup>

The Guru instructs the disciple to imbibe the godly qualities, which constitute the basis for *Bhakti*.<sup>56</sup> This is the beginning of the grace of the Guru. With love and faith in his heart, the disciple covers the stages of *Shravan* (hearing), *Mannan* (thinking constantly) and *Nidhyasan* (meditation) when he takes a dip at the innermost holy shrine.<sup>57</sup> For him the mysterious door is opened.<sup>58</sup> He rises from the plane of piety

and passing through the planes of knowledge, effort and grace, he finally enters the plane of Truth, where he becomes one with the Infinite.<sup>59</sup> Throughout his spiritual journey the Name and the grace of the Guru and the Lord take him forward.

A Guru can only take the disciple to the plane, where he himself has been able to reach. That is why the emphasis is laid on communion with the True and Perfect Guru. In this connection, the following remarks of Shri Aurobindo are noteworthy : "It is not the human defects of the Guru that can stand in the way when there is the psychic opening, confidence and surrender. The Guru is the channel or representative or the manifestation of the Divine, according to the measure of his personality or his attainment; but whatever he is, it is to the Divine, that one opens in opening to him; and if something is determined by the power of the channel, more is determined by the inherent and intrinsic attitude of the receiving consciousness, an element that comes out in the surface mind as simple trust or direct unconditional self-giving, and once that is there, the essential things can be gained even from one who seems to other than the disciple an inferior spiritual source, and the rest will grow up in the *sadhak* of itself by the Grace of the Divine, even if the human being in the Guru cannot give it."<sup>60</sup> But the line adopted by the Sikh Gurus about the communion with the flawless and Perfect Guru is more convincing. Total self-surrender to such a Guru will endure quick results. The Perfect Guru will carry the disciple with him, after the psychic opening to destination, but there are great chances of faltering in the way, if the Guru cannot help, due to ignorance.

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# ETHICAL ASPECTS OF GURU NANAK'S THOUGHT

*S. Sohan Singh*

## INTRODUCTION

1. Guru Nanak's ethical thought emanates from his religious experience. In this he was a true son of the Indian religious tradition in which a '*jivan mukta*', a man who has achieved perfect religious insight, is distinguished by his character and conduct, which must differ from the character and conduct of those around him who have not been fortunate to receive the divine gift. In fact, conduct has a wider and deeper significance in religious life in Guru Nanak's *Weltanschauung* than it generally had in that of previous Indian thinkers. This is so because, whereas the dominant strain in Indian thought generally denigrated the reality of the phenomenal world, Guru Nanak, in a way, showed a profounder faith in the Creator, by declaring that the creation of the True One cannot be devoid of reality. Not only that, His Creation was also the place where man recognises His presence.<sup>1</sup> If so, the life of the man of religious insight must have a unique place in the scheme of religious things. At one point he even declared that though nothing else was more important than the vision of Truth, the life of good conduct was even of greater importance than this vision.<sup>2</sup> Read along with his belief that there can be no life of good conduct without the experience of God,<sup>3</sup> this only means that you cannot separate a man's conduct in the world from his insight of God—the two are the two manifestations of the One Lord, they are of the same species.

## CONCEPT OF MIND

2. The pattern of a man's actions, good or bad, results from the working of his mind.<sup>4</sup> And, hence, before we lay bare the main stands in Guru Nanak's ethical thought, we will try to bring out the psychological concepts used by him and which serve to elucidate his ethical perspective.

3. Mind is born out of the five elements.<sup>5</sup> In the Indian way of thinking the five elements are the objects of the five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste and the skin sensations. In modern psychological language, mind is born out of the cognitive, conative and affective activities of the human (or animal) organism. It has three characteristics, all of which are ethically significant. First, it is restless (*Chaltai*). This is its aspect of attention. It is hard to fix attention on any object—this is a common place of psychology. As such, concentration of attention is a difficult task and has to be acquired with discipline. Second, mind implies thinking and reasoning, attainment of beliefs and of convictions (*'mati'*). Third, an essential characteristic of mind is its inherent egocentrism (*'haumai'*).

### HAUMAI

4. The third characteristic of mind deserves more thought. Inevitably, any experience is the experience of an individual and the only way in which this experience comes to consciousness is through the mind of the individual. This is the egocentric predicament. Be he a saint or a scoundrel, it is the experiencing individual's mind that organises all the experiences and derives happiness or suffering from the raw material of his experience. This essential I-ness, my-ness of experience is *'haumai'*. It is neither good nor bad. It is, along with the other two characteristics, a power of the mind, which could be used or misused. It is the power of identification which a man establishes with a way of life.

5. However, it so happens that man's mind is subject to two pulls on it—there is the pull of man's evolutionary past with its instinctive urges, there is the call of the future-vague, yet insistent. The former pull, in the terminology of Indian philosophy, is the pull of the five inborn urges of lust, anger, avarice, attachment and pride. On the other hand, is the strange, but nonetheless unignorable call of the future, embodying the deep urge of the finite to transcend itself. There is no doubt that the scales are weighed heavily in favour of the former pull. Easily, naturally, almost in spite of himself, man's mind is sucked into the life of the established patterns based on the five urges, and the mind identifies itself with this life. This life then becomes the life of the ego, the life of *haumai*, par excellence. It is *'haumai'* not only as a centre of existence for him, it is *'haumai'* as ego-feeding. As against

the religious life which keeps a man keyed on the infinite, this kind of ego-orientation is, in Guru Nanak's language, orientation towards 'māyā' (falsehood). The religious orientation is orientation towards Truth (*sac*). Left to itself mind runs after 'māyā', though in doing so, it runs after a mirage.

6. Nevertheless, it is only through this sense of identification that man transfers his allegiance from the path of 'māyā' to the path of Truth. The mind, along with its inveterate ego-centrism must switch over to the latter—there is no other psychological mechanism to do so. Thus, with regard to the sense of identification, Guru Nanak says that it is through ego-centrism that man is oriented towards truth or falsehood.<sup>6</sup> As Guru Angad, the ever-faithful interpreter of the Guru's thought puts it : "ego-centrism is a chronic disease but the treatment also lies in ego-criticism."?

### SHABAD

7. Man's urge towards ego-transcendence, has been through the generations, cutting its way through the hard basaltic rocks of the established way of worldliness. Through the ages, a tradition of self-transcendence, that is to say, a moral and religious tradition, has accumulated in every society. This tradition is made into a living message by men who have imbibed and enriched it by their own contributions. Such fountain-heads of religious traditions are the Gurus, or *Satgurus*, and their communications of this tradition to their fellow-men is *Shabad*. So that *Shabad* enshrine religious tradition in its purity and progressiveness and it is only when a man comprehends the *Shabad* that the life of worldliness or 'māyā', that is, the life of the gross 'haumai' born out of lust, anger, avarice, attachment and pride, is replaced by the life of ego-transcendence, the life of Truth or 'Nām'.<sup>8</sup> The man who is oriented towards 'Shabad' is 'Gurmukh', as contrasted to 'Manmukh', the man oriented towards ego-feeding or ('Haumai') in the sense of 'māyā'. The ethical conduct belongs to 'Gurmukh', the man imbued with the truth enshrined in the religious tradition that comes to him through 'Shabad'.<sup>9</sup>

### FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

8. It is in this very concept of 'haumai' or ego-centrism that we must find a solution to the polarity of human freedom and man's determined (and, therefore, freedomless) state. Again and again, Guru

Nanak says that man is powerless. The Lord Himself creates the world and runs the mechanism of the whole creation. Some pieces of his game. He places in a favourable position, others in a hopeless position.<sup>10</sup> Yet again and again he exhorts man to play his game well so that he is not defeated in the game of the Lord.<sup>11</sup> How can we reconcile these apparently contradictory statements? This is in fact a dilemma which has frustrated numerous philosophers who have thought over the problem of freedom versus determinism. Guru Nanak's solution of the problem lies within the concept of the supreme creativity of God. Man has come into being in the course of His Creation. But man has one characteristic which the rest of the creation lacks—he is self-conscious, he is conscious of his purpose, his ends. Through the very fact of ego-centrism he can distinguish between worthy and un-worthy deeds.<sup>6</sup> It is as if the Creator has, to serve his own purpose, bestowed a bit of creativity, with its implication of freedom and responsibility, on man. It is as if God has delegated some of his powers to man; the powers can only be utilised within the over-all creativity of God. It is the mission of man to approach ever nearer to God. In the measure he does approach Him, he gains in creativity and freedom. But, also, in the measure he approaches Him, his creativity comes to accord with the creativity of God. The paradox is that man becomes free and creative in proportion he aligns himself with God, in proportion he comes to live consciously—that is in his expanded and transcended ego-centrism—in accordance with his will.

9. As one goes through the writings of Guru Nanak, one gets the impression of an author completely drunk with God-consciousness. But we do find in his God-consciousness certain parameters of God-oriented humanity, which define the ethical conduct of man. What is more, he has laid them down in one bunch in the *Japuji*. These are the four stanzas 28 to 31. But they are given there in the form of '*sutras*' and, therefore, have to be commentarised to bring out their full meaning. Fortunately, interspersed here and there in his extensive works, there is enough guidance to the commentator to build up a faithful account of his ethical thought. This is what we will try to do in the remaining part of this paper.

10. The one hall-mark of a religious man is that he lives in accordance with the will of God.<sup>12</sup> Ethical norms are created in the

course of living thus. This is the meaning of the strain of all the four stanzas in the *Japuji* referred to in the previous para.<sup>13</sup> Broadly speaking, these ethical norms appear in two dimensions, individual and social. We will take them up for consideration in turn.

### A. INDIVIDUAL ETHICS

11. Ethical norms for the individual are given in the first of the four stanzas. They are seven as follows : 1. contentment (*santokh*), 2. life of reflection (*saram*), 3. right orientation (*dhiān*), 4. self-discipline and the culture of life (*jugat*), 5. unidirectionality or faith (*parfīt*), 6. catholicity (*Āi panthī sagal jamāfī*); and, 7. service (*man jīte jagūt*). We will explain them in the light of what the Guru has said on the subject in other places.

#### 1. CONTENTMENT

12. In more than one place, Guru Nanak discloses the inter-relationship between contentment and 'dharma' or the social order. In the *Japuji*, he calls 'dharma' that which holds together men (as the beads of a necklace are held together) on the string of contentment.<sup>14</sup> In *Vār Āsa*, he calls contentment the chariot and 'dharma' the charioteer.<sup>15</sup> Thus, for him contentment and dharma are but the inner and outer sides, the individual and the social condition, of one and the same moral phenomenon a man's fulfillment of his duties that go along with his station in life in the context of a just society. This is also the first stage in the path of the seeker of God and is described in stanza 34 of the *Japuji*. The earth with its variety of climates and seasons and soils is the place of performance of 'dharma'. To this variety is added the variety of men and women and their specialities and customs. It is in this context of plurality that we judge of a man's actions—whether by his actions he has or has not upheld social order, comprising the family, the occupations, the religious institutions, the state and other social institutions. The social order demands a certain specific pattern of behaviour from every man or woman in society—a society is the integrated system of roles of its members. By performing his own roles well, an individual enables others to perform their roles well, and in this way concertedly men build up and uphold the '*mriyādā*' (the ordered pattern) of their society. From the aspect of the individual it is described as contentment, since a man by observing the duties of his station of life, does not permit his ambitions to outrun his own role—he remains

contented with his role in society. This is also stressed in the *Gītā*.<sup>16</sup> Thus a farmer fulfils his 'dharma' by performing well his role as a grower of food or other agricultural raw-materials needed by members of his society, a learned man performs his role well by acquiring and diffusing knowledge, a king by holding even the scales of justice for every member of the society etc. Actually, through this variety of roles, they all really perform one role<sup>17</sup>—that of maintaining the desirable social order.

## 2. REFLECTION

13. But a society is not a machine and man is not a cog in a machine-wheel. He is a self, which can in a way stand apart from its own involvements and reflecting on them determine the suitability or unsuitability of his own actions in terms of his ultimate concern. That is to say, man has the capacity to withdraw himself in reflection (*saram*),<sup>18</sup> and Guru Nanak exhorts him to exercise this reflection in the light of '*Shabad*'.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of reflection is to interpret his dharma in an honest and intelligent manner, that is to say, in terms of abiding values.

14. A value can be best understood by contrasting it with its opposite-disvalue. What is the morphology of disvalue, or the signs of its presence, seeing which we can know what to avoid? Guru Nanak mentions three types of negative values. There is, firstly, the attachment to ephemeral objects which we have to avoid.<sup>20</sup> Through reflection the wise man seeks to find the permanent behind the fleeting fashion and the things which fall prey to time. Of course, all the world we see is impermanent, but hidden behind things are eternal varieties. For example, men are born and they live out their span of life and fade away; but the social order remains and it is the preservation of the social order which should be the concern of the wise man. Secondly, we have to avoid temptations. Beauty, wealth, social status and the sweet pleasures of life are tinsels.<sup>21</sup> As necessities of life they are to be used; as things which attract by their sheer sweetness we have to be on our guard against them lest they claim from us what is to be given to God. Thirdly, the kind of ego-centrism which curtains off things of real and lasting value from our sight has to be specially guarded against. We have especially to be careful against the subtle ways in which this ego-feeding insinuates itself in our life. The learned man is apt to rationalise what is really his love of possessions; the religious man

loses all religious merits by claiming the merit.<sup>22</sup> Reflection helps us to sift real values from fake values.

### 3. RIGHT ORIENTATION

15. Of course, ultimately, it is our orientation to God, i.e. '*dhiān*', which determines the content of the right and wrong in our conduct. It is the supreme fountain-head of all values. This '*dhiān*' is our orientation to the formless, eternal presence, for which Guru Nanak has one favourite name : *Nām* (The Name). This *Nām* is to a religious man—in our present context, the ethically oriented man—what his staff is to the blind man. It is *Nām* orientation which protects man from all allurements and pitfalls in his ethical career.<sup>23</sup> *Nām* is not only ultimate reality, it is the ultimate concern, which appears to us as the Truth (*sac*). This Truth is the great medicine which rises away the *pāpas*, the limitations of our finitude.<sup>24</sup> It is the only ultimate cure of our narcissistic ego-centrism.<sup>8</sup>

16. Any one who goes through his works—in fact the whole of *Adi Granth*—will find the glories of God and the great need of man's attachment to Him sung at length which is apt to bore the modern man. But the modern man has to be reminded that a man is what he is devoted to,<sup>25</sup> and there are so many distractions and temptations in the way of a man who wants to "utilise his life to some advantage" that he can not afford to forget the ultimate concern of his life in anything he does. For a man of science this ultimate concern may be research, for a religious man it is the '*Nām*'. And, hence, the greatest virtue of a religious man, according to Guru Nanak, is constant awareness of *Nām* (*Nām Simaran*).

17. Now, *Nām Simaran* is not a mechanical parrot-like repetition of what name you choose to give to God; in fact, it is this style of *Nām simaran* which most repels the modern man, and not without justification. *Nām simaran* is trying to understand God in his infiniteness. And you do not understand God by tonguing out a formal list of his standard attributes—eternal, formless, self-existent and so on. No, God is best seen in His creation, which he fills with Himself without appearing to do so.<sup>26</sup> It requires an intellectual effort to apprehend God's qualities as they are embedded in nature. As this intellectual effort is always a difficult task to do, men allow themselves to slip into the easy way of *Nām simaran* as *Nām* repetition. Perhaps '*Kirtan*' is the most popular form of *Nām simaran* for the masses—to

listen to and sing the praises of the Lord and to love the Lord with all our heart.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. "CONDUCT OF THE TRUE MINT"

18. But *Nām*-orientation must naturally, inevitably issue in "The conduct of the true mint." (*shabad sac takshal*), i.e. in the self-disciplined and cultured style of life. It is the Lord sown in this body of man sprouting forth in disciplined conduct—indeed, only thus do we know the presence of God in man.<sup>28</sup> We will try to present here the anatomy of the "conduct of true mint", as presented by Guru Nanak in his works.

19. The standard Sikh formula for ethical conduct is *Nām, Dān, Ishnān*<sup>29</sup>—God-orientation, service to others and purity of one's own life. This is, however, too outlinish to give an indication of the richness of the Guru's thought on this subject. We will, therefore, propose a five-fold classification of the distinctively ethical character as follows : self-disciplining (*Dil Darvāni*), equanimity (*Samasarata*) hard work (*Ghāl*), culture (*Guni*) and a dignified simplicity (*Garībī Ves*).

20. The Creator records the love of man for Him in terms of self-discipline, cultivated after the manner of a true hermit.<sup>30</sup> We have mentioned the stage of 'Dharma', in which a man plays his distinctive social role. An essential part of this role is his life as a house-holder. A house-holder is apt to lose himself in the life of petty pleasures. Guru Nanak says that the house-holder of the first waters is he who exercises self-control and keeping his desires in check, regulates his life.<sup>31</sup> One should eat just as much as is necessary for the maintenance of health and sleep as little as possible.<sup>32</sup> Knowing their injurious nature, one should keep away from lust and anger particularly, we should root out greed and avarice from our mind—only then could we live in the spirit of God.<sup>33</sup>

21. Equanimity of mind has been regarded highly by all Indian thinkers and Guru Nanak is no exception. If anything, he has given it a positive face when he says of the wise men that day and night they live in perpetual delight.<sup>34</sup>

22. The greatest upsetters of evenness of mind are worry and fear. Worry arises from our inability to sunder established links when conditions in the world make them infeasible. Our inability to detach ourselves from our loves and hatreds arises out of the narrowness of



our ego-centrism. Our loves and hatreds raise hopes and worries and when the hopes seem to be believed we fall into an inner tantrum—which is what worry is. The remedy, it is obvious, lies in rising above the ego-centrally generated hope and fears through reflection.<sup>35</sup> Our greatest worries come with clinging to life and there is no greater test of spiritual strength than when a man is prepared to face death with equanimity—Guru Nanak has said this time after time. When God dwells in the heart of man, let God dispose of him as he would.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the mood then is to say, well, if the Creator fulfils His purpose through us, let Him worry!<sup>37</sup>

23. Here we must point out a very common misinterpretation of Guru Nanak's concept of '*Bhau*'. This is the often taken as fear. But, really, there is no religion where there is fear, and by '*Bhau*' Guru Nanak means discipline or self-regulation. By no physiological alchemi can you bring love out of fear, but in many places Guru Nanak associates '*Bhau*' (self-regulation) with love of God.<sup>38</sup> Guru Angad, ever near to Guru Nanak's mind, has explicitly stated that there could be no service of the lord where is fear of the Lord; a true servant is he who has completely attuned himself to the Lord.<sup>39</sup>

24. Going to the root of the matter, the whole trouble arises because of the "pleasure principle"—Man's invertebrate propensity to pursue pleasure, the hall-mark of our finitude. But finitude is finitude and the pursuit of pleasure ever lands us in its opposite—suffering. The wise man, therefore, always tries to place himself, through reflection, "out of bounds," to pleasures and sufferings alike.<sup>40</sup>

25. As mentioned earlier, Guru Nanak inculcates the virtues of small sleep. In other words, he abhors laziness. Positively, he exhorts men to work hard. The two great aims of life are *Nam simaran* and service to others, and both are worthily achieved only on the basis of life of hard work.<sup>41</sup> Further, that giving is worthy giving which is given out of the earning of one's hard work.<sup>42</sup> Did not Guru Nanak himself settle down to earn his own living at Kartarpur after he had completed his religious search?

26. Among the numerous men of God who have adorned the pages of history, a peculiar charm of Guru Nanak lies in his combining in a towering religious personality sensitiveness to other reflecting surfaces in the diamond of the human soul. This comes out in the

"*Sodara*", the greatest hymn he wrote, perhaps the greatest hymn ever written. At least, in one place, he has given his view of what a rounded human personality should look like. He says those men are real asses who are proud, but lack any excellence. Among these excellences, he mentions mastery of language, knowledge, music, sensitiveness to beauty, awareness of what is happening around you, intelligence, wisdom and literacy.<sup>43</sup>

27. Lastly, a man with the "conduct of the true mint" is simple in his appearance and behaviour. Those assume airs and throw about their weight in the world, are so tainted that however often they bathe in the 68 places of pilgrimage, the taint could never be removed. Indeed, they are good men in this world who are as silk inside, while appearing as coarse clothes outside.<sup>44</sup> And yet a cultured man would also combine a quiet dignity with his simple demeanour. This dignity comes through economy of speech,<sup>45</sup> avoidance of needless debate,<sup>46</sup> and, above all, self-reliance.<sup>47</sup>

## 5. FAITH

28. A man who has God in his heart and acts as described above walks erect with the staff of faith (*parfīt*) in his hand. In his well-regulated life and in his submission to God he has found his God bestowing fearlessness on him.<sup>48</sup> He says, "Now that I have your True Name in my heart, who is the other at whose door I should knock and to whom I should bow my head?"<sup>49</sup> Expect the True Master, he cares for none;<sup>50</sup> he can serve no ordinary creature henceforth.<sup>51</sup> Not only does his faith show itself in this outer strengthen but also in an inner strength. His mind is not like a divided house torn within itself because of doubts, as is the mind of a *manmukh*.<sup>52</sup> He has no need to qualify his principles by "ifs" and "buts" nor any need to take recourse to sophistries, for that only soils the character.<sup>53</sup> His conduct is steady and unwavering, because of his hold on Truth.<sup>54</sup>

29. In the third line of stanza 28 of the *Japuji*, which we are discussing, Guru Nanak gives two *sutras* pertaining to the social aspect of a wise man's conduct. These *sutras* do not give the ethical principles on which society is to be based; those will figure in stanza 29. Here he gives the ethical bridges a wise man builds to join himself to others; (a) to treat group other than yours with the same respect that you give to your own group and (b) conquering the world by conquering the

minds of the people.<sup>55</sup> We have called them the principles of catholicity and service.

## 6. CATHOLICITY—INTER-GROUP HARMONY

30. The walls of prejudice that rise between man and man are built on the foundation of ego-feeding when men unilaterally and subjectively appropriate all the good to themselves and assign all the evil to others. Guru Nanak, therefore, seeks to strike at the very root of prejudice by asking men to reverse this apportionment. He says, "we should not claim ourselves good and see other as evil beings. Suppressing our ego-feeding we should go on the basis of Truth."<sup>56</sup> If we, thus, change the curvature of our mind's sight we will see no enemy, no stranger, we will dwell in harmony with every human being.<sup>57</sup>

31. Leaving aside generalities, he applied this principle of friendly co-existence to religions and caste divisions of his time. As is well known, his first thrust at men's prejudices was when he proclaimed at the every beginning of his mission that there were no Hindus and no Muslims, meaning thereby that they are both rooted in a common humanity. Between a good Muslim and a good non-Muslim there could be no antagonism—not only did he say this, he demonstrated it by his warm and outgoing friendliness for his contemporary Muslim saints and by admitting Muslims to his *Sangat*.

32. But it was against the satanic ogre of Hindu casteism that he directs his deadly salvoes. In the last resort neither power nor caste, but the intrinsic merit of character counts.<sup>58</sup> Caste and colour and family pride vanish when you entertain the true Teaching.<sup>59</sup> His denigration of caste was not a formal gesture. In the Guru's kitchen which he established soon after setting down at Kartarpur, and which has continued since as a living institution of the organised Sikh religion, every body was expected to dine together without distinction of high and low. If, indeed, the shackles of caste system, undeniably existing in Punjabi society, were yet much less rigid in Punjab than in other parts of the country, it was due entirely to the work of Sikh Gurus in this respect, first begun by Guru Nanak. Nor is the validity of the Guru's stand against caste less now than it was in his time. The post-1947 Punjab and India have been seen a clear relaxation of caste ties, but the ego-feeding of man that came out in caste in now insinuating itself into our society in other forms. The solitude between the rich and

the poor, the educated and the uneducated is no less satanic than the solitude between the high caste and the low caste, which a man of God must always try to break.

## 7. SERVICE

33. Guru Nanak bases the complimentary virtue of service on love—for only through love can you conquer the minds of others. A man is as dust and ashes if there is no love in him.<sup>60</sup> Love must be clearly distinguished from the co-incidence of self-interest of men. Mutuality based on exchange of selfish advantages is other than love—love is a genuine shifting of the centre of our life from the individual self which happens to be us to the self which is in all. This love express itself in an ascending curve on which we locate four points; sweetness to others in daily life, forgiveness, compassion and service.

34. Prideless sweetness in daily life is the basis of all social excellence;<sup>61</sup> especially, we must avoid rude speech, because by speaking rudely we foolishly cast ourselves away from others.<sup>62</sup> The way to radiate sweetness in life is to avoid speaking ill of others<sup>63</sup> and to speak well of others in whichever place we are.<sup>64</sup>

35. As a result of sustained reflection on *Shabad* (which is nectar to our soul) we find ourselves having received from the *Shabad*-source a mind which naturally takes to forgiveness (*Khimā*)<sup>65</sup>—it is, indeed, sweetness matured. In the spirit of Guru Nanak, forgiveness is not to be understood as mere overlooking of offences aimed at us by others, it is not to permit a sense of false pride to stand in the way of a sound relationship with others, in which relationship we can promote 'dharma.'

36. The next step in the same direction is compassion (*dayā*). When a man dies to the ego-feeding life, he will find established in his heart universal compassion. Having recognised himself in all beings he himself will become great,<sup>69</sup> that is to say, transcend his finitude. If one finds himself in others, one will naturally do for them what he normally does for oneself. This is giving oneself to others—*dān*. Without this giving oneself there is no *dān*. That is why Guru Nanak insists that we must give only from what we earned by the sweat of our brow.

37. The peak of the curve we are presently tracing is reached in service (*sevā*). *Dān* is an isolated act, *sevā* is a style of life where one gives continuously *Dān* may be giving a desirable thing, *sevā* is giving

oneself. In the realm of '*Dharam Khand*' service is the point of fulfilment-short of service (*sevā*) there is no fulfilment.<sup>67</sup> To do service is to take the all-society view-point in place of the egoistic point of view, otherwise you do not get the status in moral life which belongs to the fulfilled man.<sup>68</sup> The best service a man do is, that is, his highest fulfilment comes, when having himself swam across the region of morality, he helps in doing so all those associated with him.<sup>69</sup> This leads us to the consideration of the ethics of those on whom it has fallen to lead their fellowmen, the ethics nucleated in the 29th stanza of the *Japuji*.

## B. SOCIAL CONCERN

38. I think if there is one point where Guru Nanak differs from the general run of saints, particularly the great leaders of the Indian *Bhakti* Movement, that is his deep social concern. He thinks of men without forgetting humanity and humanity for him is the sum of social units and a social unit is what it is because of its leadership. Some of his most poignant hymns are those in which he relates the miserable plight of men brought about by either a failure of leadership or perverse leadership. Again and again, in different stages of man's journey to God, he brings out the place of the leaders. In the region of morality he dwells on the role of kings, in the region of knowledge, we should know the leaders who have shown the way to the blind,<sup>70</sup> and in the region of his Grace, the *Bhaktas* do not leave the world, they rather dwell among the people.<sup>71</sup> His condemnation of a bad king is full-throated. (For that matter he does not spare the people for their backbone-lessness).<sup>72</sup> He did not mince words with the *Sadhus* or *Yogis* when he told them what he thought of them for hiding themselves among the mountains while the world was sinking for lack of leadership.<sup>73</sup>

## SOCIAL ENDS-PROPAGATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND COMPASSION

39. He puts leaders in three categories; kings, Gurus and *panches*. For all the three, the social philosophy is the same; men are brought together in society by the Lord; society should, therefore, serve His purpose. It is contrary to Lord's purpose to run society on the two principles of power and wealth, i.e. to say, to put men to gain power and amass wealth. God's purpose creating society is served rather by arousing in the hearts of men the other two principles of knowledge

and compassion—knowledge of what has been achieved by men in advancing towards God who, it may be remembered, can best be known in His creation, and compassion in mobilising man in making further advances on the way to Him. In directing men to serve God's purpose through sensitivizing them to knowledge and compassion, the two grand trunk roads out of the finitude of man, the leader may have to create new associations of men by taking them out of some existing groups and joining them in new ways of co-operation. In doing so, he may cause happiness to some and suffering to others. If the leaders is guided by overall compassion, the happiness and unhappiness of individuals should not make him serve from the path he is pursuing in guiding men in society to serve God's purpose.<sup>74</sup>

### PANCHES, GURUS, KINGS

40. In the light of this social philosophy what is the function of the *panch*, the Guru and the King ? The *panches* occupy the lower rungs of leadership. On the one hand, they are accepted by the king and the Guru, on the other hand they are the leaders of their groups. In the image presented by Guru Nanak, they sit at the court of the king and they have the Guru in their minds.<sup>75</sup> They, thus, help the people to give to *Babar* (the ruler at the time of Guru Nanak, i.e. to say, to the king or state) what is due from them to Babar and to give to *Baba* (as Guru Nanak was affectionately called by the Punjabis of his time, i.e., the spiritual leader) what is due to *Baba*. In other words, they help the people to maintain the social structure or the *mriyādā* of the society, and also to think of God, who is much more than this *mriyādā*. The Guru and the king depend on the *panches* for their own work and it is from these *panches* that the higher rungs of leadership emerge.

41. By their respective positions in society, the king and the Guru are the supreme directors of lives of men in their societies. But only a man who has God in his heart is fit to occupy such a position—this is true as much of the guru as of the king. As the third Guru said, "True kings are those who have imbibed the Truth."<sup>76</sup> Here we will give Guru Nanak's concept of a king, which could legitimately be interpreted as applying to the ruling group in any society. It is his philosophy of the state.

### IF KINGS BE WISE

42. In the *Japuji*, Guru Nanak mentions the king as one of those

who glorify God—that is, has an element of divinity in him—and he does so as standing "On the door" of dharma, that is to say, as one responsible for the maintenance of 'dharma'. This idea is also repeated in other places. Thus, the function of a king is to maintain conditions in a society which are favourable for the continuing *mriyādā* of that society. Besides the general function of guiding the society on the two principles of knowledge and compassion, the king has two specific functions accruing to him. The first functions of a king, and one which may be said to be the differentia of kingship, is to dispense justice—this is his 'dharma'.<sup>77</sup> Generally, the powerful are inclined to trespass on the rights of others and then, having fattened themselves on the poor, try to establish themselves as good and great men by performing religious acts or act as beneficiaries of society—this is like seasoning an otherwise improper food. But the seasoning cannot make the food eat-worthy.<sup>78</sup> It is for the king to protect the poor from the grabbing propensities of the powerful. For this purpose, he must have the necessary means and the necessary power. The means he acquires by taxing the people—this is a proper relationship between the king and the people.<sup>79</sup> These means the king must use to acquire power and the power has to be used as occasions demand. As Guru Nanak says, "the king can do justice if he has the power to be justice, no one will obey him merely in the name of God."<sup>80</sup>

43. But God's grace is especially present when the poor and lowly are looked after.<sup>81</sup> The uplift of the poorer sections of society is thus the special responsibility of the king—as of the guru, no doubt. This is the societal significance of the principle of compassion, which is one of the two main principles of state policy mentioned in an earlier para.

44. The king thus occupies a key position in society and it is proper that he should have the ability demanded of his high office. In at least two places, repeating almost the same language, Guru Nanak has said that only the competent should hold the king's office and that the king should discharge the duties of his office with the advice of the *panches*, the middle-rung leaders.<sup>82</sup> Also, he should be guided in his work by principles of true religion.<sup>83</sup>

45. We thus see that placing man in the vector field of *Nām*, the Universal spirit, Guru Nanak draw in stanzas 28 and 29 of the *Japuji* a comprehensive scheme of the "conduct of the true mint", that is, the

ethical conduct of man, both in its individual and social aspects, both for the common man and the leaders of society. We have tried to bring out the full significance of the synoptic content of this part of the *Japuji* by gleaning supporting ideas drawn from his writings. Amidst all this, we must not forget his basic concept that a genuine morality has its roots in a religious life. This is the significance of stanzas 30 and 31 of the *Japuji*, which we have not touched upon in this article because of its defined scope.

### REFERENCES

1. Nānak sach dātāru sinākhātu kudarati  
(*Vār Majh M. I.*, p. 141)
2. Sachahu crai sabhu ko upper sachi āchāru  
(*Sri. Ast. M. I.*, p. 62)
3. Nāmi rate sachu karanī sāru.  
(*Sidh, G—33*, p. 941)
4. Ihu manu karamā ihu manu dharamā  
(*Āsā, M. I.*, 9-8-3, p. 415)
5. Ihu manu panch tatu te janamā  
(*Āsā, M. I.*, 9-8-3, p. 415)
6. Hau vichi sachiāru kūrīāru  
(*Āsā dī Vār*, 7-1, p. 466)
7. Haumai diragh rogu hai dārū bhī isu māhi  
(*Āsā dī Vār*, 7-2, p. 466)
8. Nāme rātū haumiai Jāi nāmi rāte sachi rahe samāi  
(*Sidh, G. 32*, p. 941)
9. Gurmukhi haumai sabadi jalāe  
(*Sidh, G. 42*, p. 942)
10. Dekhahi kitā āpnā dhari kachī pachī sārīai  
(*Āsā dī Vār*, Pauri 21, p. 474)
11. Jiu sāhib nali na hārīai  
te vecha pāsā dhālīai  
(*Āsā dī Vār*, p. 474)
12. Hukami rajāi chalṇā  
(*Japuji 1.*)
13. Aādesu tisai aādesu  
(*Japuji 28, 29, 30, 31*)
14. Dhaulu dharamu daiā kā pūru  
santokhu thāpi rakhiā jini sūti  
(*Japuji—16*)
15. Satajugi rathu santokh ka  
dharamu agai rathvaha  
(*Āsā dī Vār 13-1*, p. 470)



16. See Gita, Chapter 18

(slok 46)

17. Sarab sabadaṃ ek sabadaṃ

(Āsā di Vār, 12-3, p. 469)

18. For the meaning of *Janam*, see Sohan Singh's "the seeker's path", Longmān 1959, p. 74.

19. Gur sabadu vīchārahi rahahi nirāre

(mārū sohle—M. I., p. 1039)

20. Tisu siu nehu na kījāi jo dīsai chalanhāru.

(Sri rāg. M. I., p. 21)

21. See Āsā di Vār, slok I of stanza 10

22. Mūrakh paṇḍit hikmatī hujatī sanjai karoḥi piāru.

dharamī dharamu karahi gāvāvahi mangahi mokh duaru.

(Āsā di Vār, 11-2, p. 469)

23. Mai andhule hari nāmu lakutī tohañī

rahou sahib ki ṭek na mohai mohani

(Suhi, Ast. M. I., Ghar 10, p. 752)

24. Sachu sabhana hoi dārū pāp kadhe dhoi.

(Āsā di Vār 10-2, p. 468)

25. Jaisā sevai taiso hoi

(Gauri ast. M. I., p. 224)

26. Jati mahi joti jotī mahi jātā

akal kala bharapūri rahia

(Āsā di Vār 12-2, p. 469)

27. Gavīai suñīai mani rakhīai bhau

(Japuji, 5)

28. Sachu tā paru jāñīai ja jugati jāñāi jīu

dharati kaia sadhi kai vichi dei karta biu.

(Āsā di Vār, 10-2, p. 468)

29. Gurmukhi namu danu isnānu.

(Sidh, G. 37, p. 942)

30. Dil darvanī jo kare darvesī dilu rasi.

isak muhabati Nānaka lekha karte pasi.

(maru, slok M. I, p. 1090)

31. So girahī jo nigrahu karai

japu tapu sanjamu bhīkhia karai.....

so girahī gānga kā nīru.

(Ramkali Kī Vār, slok, M. I-12, p. 952)

32. Khandit niara alap aharam

Nānak tatu bīcharo

(Sidh, G. 8, p. 939)

33. Gurmukhi lobhu nivārīai

hari siu banīai

(Āsā Ast. M. I., p. 419)

34. Sadā anandi rahahi dinu rāti  
(*Āsā di Vār*, 6-1, p. 466)
35. Ās andese te nihakevalu  
haumai sabadi jalāe  
(*Āsā di Vār*, 9-2, p. 468)
36. Antari gurmukhi tūn vasahi jiu bhavai tiu nirjasi  
(*Sri rāg*, M. I., Ghar I, p. 20)
37. Jini karatai karaṇa kīa chinta bhī karnī tah  
(*Āsā di Vār*, 8-1, p. 467)
38. E.g. Nānak jinh mani bhau  
tinha mani bhāu  
(*Āsā di Vār*, 5-2, p. 465)
39. Eh kinehī chakarī jitu bhau khasam na jai  
Nānak sevaku kadhīai ji setī khasam samāi  
(*Āsā di Vār*, 23-2, p. 475)
40. Sukh duck sam kari janīahi sabadi bhedi sukhū hoi  
(*Sri rag*, M. I.,—Ast. p. 57)
41. Jinī namu dhiāiā gae masakati ghālī  
Nānak te mukh ujale ketī chhutī nālī  
(*Japuji*—Slok)
42. Nānak agai so milai ji khate ghale dei  
(*Āsā di Vār*, 17-1, p. 472)
43. Ikanā nād na bed na gīa  
rasu raskas na jāṇṇṭi  
ikanā sudhi na budhi na akali  
sār akhar kā bheu nā lahanti  
Nānak se nar asali khar ji binu  
guṇ garabu karanti  
(*Vār sarang Slok* M. I., p. 1246)
44. Jihn paṭu andari bahari gudaḍu te bhale sansari  
(*Asā di Vār*. M. I., p. 473)
45. Bahuta bolaṇa Jhakhaṇ hoi  
(*Dhanasri* M. 3, p. 661)
46. Mūrkhai nālī na lujhīai  
(*Āsā di Vār*—Pouri—19. p. 473)
47. Āpaṇ hathī āpanā āpe he kaju savārīai  
(*Āsā di Vār*, Pouri—20, p. 474)
48. Bhai vichi nirbhau pāiā.  
(*Sorathi* M. I., p. 499)
49. Daru bībhā mai nimih ko kaikari salāmu  
hiko maiḍa tuo dhaṇī sākā mukhinamu  
(*Asā Ast.* M. I., p. 418)
50. Parvah nāhī kisai keṛī bājhu sache nāh  
(*Āsā di Vār*—20-2, p. 473)

51. Abe tabe ki chākārī kiu dargah pāvai  
(*Āsā Chhant* M. I., Ghar 4, p. 420)
52. Manmukhi bharamī bhuḷāṇā nā tisu rangū hai,  
marasi hoi vidāṇā mani tani bhangu hai.  
(*Suhi. Ast.* M. I., Ghar 10, p. 752 )
53. Gurmatī sāchī hujatī dūri  
bahutu siāṇap lāgai dhūri  
(*Āsā Chaupade* M. I., Ghar 2, p. 352)
54. Gurmatī chāl nihachal nahī ḍolai  
gurmatī sāchi sahaji hari bolai  
(*Gauri Ast.* M. I. p. 227)
55. Āī panthī sagal jamātī  
mani jitai jagu jītu  
(*Japuji* 28)
56. Nā ham change ākhīahi burā na disai koi  
Nānak haumai mārīai sache jīhaḍā soi  
(*Maru* M. I. p. 1015)
57. The words are Guru Arjan's but the thought is common to him and Guru Nanak.  
Nā ko bairi nahī bigāṇā  
sagal sangi ham kau bani āī  
(p. 1299)
58. Agai jāti na jorū hai  
agai jīu nave  
(*Asā di Vār* 11-3, p. 469)
59. Jāti baran kul sahasā chūkā  
gurmatī sabadi bīchāri  
(*Sarang Chaupade*, M. I. Ghar 2, p. 1198)
60. Andaru khālī prem binu  
ḍhahi ḍheri tanu chhār  
(*Sri Rag* M. I., Ast. p. 62)
61. Miṭhatu nīvī Nānakā guṇ changiāiān tatu  
(*Āsā di Vār*, 14-1, p. 470)
62. Fikā boli viguchaṇā mūrakh man ajāṇ  
(*Sri Rag* M. I. p. 15)
63. Mandā kisei na ākhīai  
paḍī akharū eho bujhīai  
(*Āsā di Vār*, Pouri 19, p. 473)
64. Jithe jāi bahīai bhalā kahīai  
(*Vadhans* M. I., p. 766)
65. Khojat khojat anmrītu pīā  
khimā gahī manu satguri dīyā  
(*Dakhani Onkār*—19, p. 932)

66. Jivatu marai tā sabhu kichhu sūjhai  
antari jāṇai sarab daiā,  
Nānak tā kau milai vaḍāi apu pachāṇai sarab jiā  
(*Sidh G. 24, p. 940*)
67. Binu sevā phalu kabahu na pāvasi  
sevā karanī sārī  
(*Māru M. I. p. 992*)
68. Āpa gavāi sevā kare  
tā kichhu pāāi mānu  
(*Āsā di Vār 22-1, p. 474*)  
These words are Guru Angad's but they faithfully reflect Guru Nanak's views.
69. Āpa tarahi sangati kul tārahi  
tin saphal janamu jagi āiā  
(*Māru, Solhe M.I., p.1039*)
70. Suniāi sekh pīr pātisāh  
sunīāi andhe pavahi rahu  
(*Japuji 11*)
71. Jithai bhagat vasahi ke loa  
(*Japuji, 37*)
72. Andhī rayati gian viḥūṇī  
bhahi bhare murdaru  
(*Āsā dī vār 11-21, p. 469*)
73. This is related by Bhai Gurdas as follows :  
Babe kahia nath ji . . .  
sidh chhap baithe parbatīn  
kaṇ jagat kau par utārā  
jogī giān viḥūṇī nis din ang  
lagāin chhāra,  
bājh guru ḍuba sansārā
74. See, The seeker's path, p. 80-81 for the interpretation given here of stanza 29 of *Japuji*.
75. Panche sohahi dari rājānu  
panchā kā guru eku dhiānu  
(*Japuji 16*)
76. Jinī sachu pachhāṇiā  
sachu rāje seī  
(*Vār Māru, Slok M. 3, Pouri 6, p. 1088*)
77. Raje chulī niāv kī-  
(*Sarang M.I. slok, p. 1240*)
78. Maraṇ pāhi harām mahi  
hoi halālu nā jāi  
(*Vār Majh, p. 141*)

79. Guru Nanak calls it

Dilī lae di gandh

80. Rājā niau kare hathi hoi

kahai khudai na mānai koi

(*Āsā ch*, M.I., *Ghar* 2, p. 350)

81. Jithai nīch samālīani tithai

nadari terī bakhasīs

(*Siri Rag* M.I. *Ghar* 1, p. 15)

82. Raja takhati tikai

gunī bhai panchāñ ratu

(*Māru* M.I., *Ghar* 10, p. 992)

83. Takhati bahai takhatai kī lāik

panch samāi gurmati pāik

(*Māru Solhe*-18, p. 1039)

## GURU NANAK'S SOCIAL THOUGHT

*Dr. Manmohan Sehgal*

Guru Nanak had a double purpose in his preachings—social and spiritual. His social views depicted his reaction to the times whereas the spiritual was the call of his own soul. He advocated a new social order as a reaction against the social conditions and fought against the environments in which he was born and brought up. In the middle ages, a number of saints appeared in all the parts of India, preaching non-dualistic theism. Guru Nanak occupied a unique place among them. The followers of other saints and prophets came under the spell of their spirituality, but could not form a movement after the death of the saint or the prophet. On the other hand, Guru Nanak organised his '*sikhs*' (followers) into a community. The practice of nominating the next Guru (spiritual successor) for keeping the candle of Guruship lit, is a definite proof of the organisational approach of Guru Nanak. The other saints and sages of medieval times could not do so. In his teachings Guru Nanak does not differentiate between the Master (Guru) and the Lord (*Brahm*). In Nanak's composition, the True Word of the Absolute was the Master and He himself forwarded that word to the next Guru.

Guru Nanak's composition gives a clear picture of the contemporary disorder and decay which must have prompted him so preach about a new social order. Guru Nanak was deeply moved to witness the pitiable condition of the Indian society afflicted by Babar's treacherous invasion causing bloodshed, and cruelties.<sup>1</sup> He deplored this social condition on the one hand while on the other, pleaded with the Almighty for bearing the injustice patiently. At Sultanpur, after taking bath in the rivulet '*Bein*' he came out chanting 'there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim.'

The society in Guru Nanak's time was divided into Hindus and Muslims. The Muslims had conquered the Hindus and it was, therefore, the latter who faced the atrocities of the former so often. The Hindus

who preferred to adopt Islam to save their lives proved to be the bitterest enemies of their former community. Those who got into government jobs due to their conversion or some other reason, never hesitated in cutting the throats of their brothers.

The Hindus were not only troubled by the power-hungry officers of the Islamic sovereignty and other members of this privileged class but were also hated by the Brahmans and other higher classes. Under the circumstances, the Hindus could not resist the temptation of adopting Islam wherein they regained not only a sense of self-respect but also an equal status in society.

All the castes in Hindu society, forgetting their duties, were lost in ostentations. They ignored their language, culture and religion. The '*pranayam*' (exercising control over the process of breathing) of the *yogis* had become a source of extracting money. Holding the nose by fingers, they claimed to have got the knowledge of the entire universe; but in fact, they did not know what was happening even behind them. The Kashatriyas (the warrior class) were also not performing their duty. People were adopting the language of the conquerors. They did not have any regard either for their language or for their culture. All the four classes of the Hindus, ignoring their duties, were damaging the society.<sup>2</sup> Hypocrisy ruled supreme. While taxes were being levied on the Brahman and the cow by the Hindus officials, they hoped to get salvation through the rituals performed with cow-dung. Brahmans wore white clothes, painted their foreheads and held rosary in their hands and thus posed to lead a pious life, but they too did not hesitate to accept livelihood from the Muslims. The Muslims were outrageous. They sucked the blood of their subjects but offered prayers in mosques. The murderers, with sacred threads on their shoulders were called the *Pundits*, i.e. the learned persons. False moral codes and doctrines were being preached. On the one hand, the Hindus did not allow Muslims to enter their cooking squares and on the other, they ate meat of the goat slaughtered by the Muslims.

Some people fed themselves on filth, put dust on their heads and lived in jungles and crematories.<sup>3</sup> People called them '*Bodh Tantric*' and feared them. Instead of guiding the people, they had become a source of awe to them. Others so called spiritualists were busy earning their livelihood instead of submitting themselves to the will of God.

There were *Rasdhariyas* (the performers who enact the exploits of Krishna) and *Leela*-players (those who represent the deeds of divine incarnations) who moved their heads lunatically and danced in streets and on roads. Guru (religious or spiritual teachers) danced and the disciples sang and they never hesitated from performing mean acts for the sake of their bread. They were smeared with dust and exhibited in a vulgar way the parts of body.<sup>4</sup>

Guru Nanak observed that the conduct of even the intellectuals was not above board. They studied voluminous books and acquired knowledge of the scriptures, but at the same time, they grew egoists. They indulged in idol-worship. They told lies and had forgotten the Creator. They were whiling away their lives in worthless rituals.<sup>5</sup>

Such disorderly, sinful, declining and hypocritical society came under the criticism of Guru Nanak. The graphic picture of this society as painted by him is very painful and deeply touching. Such a society was badly in need of reform and perhaps this was the reason why Guru Nanak, alongwith his spiritual leadership, became a social reformer also. He struck at the falsehood of the society for which he prescribed 'do's' and 'don't's', reinstated woman to her place of honour, and dreamt of the uplift of the society through a moral code. He laid down the foundation of a society which was free from the orthodox traditions and fetters, was full of love for God and His creatures and which became a symbol of humanity in real sense of the word. Guru Nanak's social code was based on three golden principles :

1. to earn through the sweat of brow (*kirat karna*)
2. to share one's earnings with the needy (*vand chhakna*) and to
3. recite the Name (*Naam japana*)

These were the ideals which he prescribed for this society :

Truth, Contentment and Intellect (*sat, santokh and vichar*).

Truth was considered to be the highest duty for no other element is as comprehensive as truth. Perhaps that is the reason why Guru Nanak, in his composition, has considered everything else to be of lower order than Truth. Contentment eliminates attachment and the five deadly evils of the human character. Intellect is the touch-stone for testing one's actions. It imbibes goodness in human actions.

Guru Nanak resolved to put these three cardinal virtues into



practice. All the three principles mentioned above indicate this very fact. Chanting of the Name is essential for realising the Truth and approaching near *Brahman*. Earning through one's own efforts is not only a symbol of diligence but it also gives contentment. Giving alms to the needy increases the tendency of benevolence by making distinction between worthy and the unworthy through the touch-stone of intellect.

## II

Guru Nanak's thought contains in it a discussion on the ancient institutions like caste system, marriage and family. Infact, the Guru was in search of a society in which equality, freedom and fraternity could be established in the real sense. He established the equality by breaking up the caste system, achieved liberty from the age-old customs and traditions and brought about fraternity by striking at the root of the sense of the high and the low.

The Guru has refuted the contemporary form of caste systems. When religion does not sustain itself and the whole world is turned into one caste,<sup>6</sup> where lies the importance of the caste system? The problem of caste system was all the more acute at that time. The Hindus, on the one hand, adopted ways of the Muslim by adopting their language, dress and prayer,<sup>7</sup> and on the other condemned their ways by calling them '*mlechchh*' (a shabby alien or a non-Aryan in a contemptuous sense). Guru Nanak has preached against the undesirable vanity of the so-called high caste and has taught a lesson of modesty. He, while denouncing the false superiority of the Brahmins, has given a place of honour to the lower classes of society.

In the ashram-system (the four stages in the life of caste Hindus, viz. *Brahmcharya*—the student or the learner's stage; *Grihastha*—the householder; *Vaanaprastha*—the abandoner of worldly things, and *Sanyas*—the anchorite), Guru Nanak has given the highest place to the *Grihastha ashram*. He felt that the duties of the last two *ashrams* can also be performed during this stage. A householder—man or woman—while performing the domestic duties can also achieve emancipation. The chanting of the Name can keep him aloof from the poisonous effects of the world.<sup>8</sup> His life ought to remain unsoiled like a lotus in the mud.

Guru Nanak has not denounced the family relationships, but in his view, the only true relationship in the true social order, is between

the *Bhakta* (the worshipper) and Bhagwan (God). All the other relations are short lived, but the affection of the benevolent God is abiding. The relations between the father and the son, wife and husband, son and daughter etc. are corrupted for they are based on the worldly falsehood. The only relationship acceptable is that of truth. Guru Nanak has given a spiritual tinge to all relationships through his typical symbolic way and thus he calls Intellect the mother, Contentment the father, Truth the brother, Soul the parents-in-law and Action the beloved.<sup>9</sup>

Guru Nanak has accepted the institution of marriage. As the union of man and women is quite natural, marriage is inevitable for the entry in the '*Grihastha Ashram*'. However, he does not have any faith in the rituals attached to marriage. He gives more importance to the name of God than to any good omen. He believes that the vow taken in the name of God is the best and the strongest.<sup>10</sup> All the other Gurus, in his line, have strengthened Guru Nanak's social ideology. Guru Ram Das, through symbols, gave a spiritual meaning to the matrimonial rite wherein the bride and the bridegroom move together round the sacred fire. Guru Arjan Dev has made reference to the festive music, auspicious singing and blessings to the bride and the bridegroom. Guru Amar Das, while prohibiting the priest of the bridal party from accepting anything, in charity, wished for absolute unity between the husband and the wife.

### III

The place of woman was not honourable in the medieval society. In the *Naath* sect, she has been called a tigress who swallows the man. For the Muslims, woman was only a source of gratification of their sexual urge. In Hindus, some sects called her by the name of '*maya*' and the others by '*shakti*'. In short, the place of woman in the society was quite low. Guru Nanak repudiated all these attitudes. In his opinion, woman is a respectable part of the society. The existence of man, in this world has been made possible only by woman. She is the mother of the humanity. It is in her womb where man is moulded and it is her milk with which he is brought up. Contempt for her is nothing but a gross impropriety. The Guru has asked at the top of his voice how the woman who had given birth to kings and monarchs, saints and hermits, could be detestable.<sup>11</sup> He also raised his voice against prostitution and illegitimate relations with other women.

Guru Nanak had observed a number of evils in the social

behaviour. People could not distinguish between a friend and a foe. Unhealthy criticism, backbiting and lack of discretion were some of the common weaknesses. The Guru in his composition has opposed all these things. He has warned people against the friendship of the stupid. Such friendship is like a ripple in water. It never benefits anybody.<sup>12</sup>

#### IV

Guru Nanak found that the contemporary Hindu society was declining. The Hindus, in order to get the official ranks, sacrificed their self respect and completely submitted themselves to the Turks. The Turkish impact on the dress and the conduct was clearly visible.<sup>13</sup> The charitable persons of the society dreamt of emancipation by giving alms out of their unholy earnings; the Gurus reached even the houses of their disciples in order to initiate them; money had become the basis of relationship between man and woman; people had lost faith in the scriptures and they worshipped their individual gods.<sup>14</sup> The faith in the existence of God was lost. In such circumstances, Guru Nanak's social message based on spirituality, proved very helpful in doing away with social evils and establishing the new values.

Guru Nanak, first of all, attacked the false prestige of those people who, suppressing their conscience, used to show themselves off. They indulged in hypocrisy and injustice in the pursuit of gratifying their own vanity. Guru Nanak called upon them to give up this attitude. Such affectations make people forget the name of God and at last, there is none to help.<sup>15</sup> He has preached against all the impositions. He was also against hoarding money. He was of the firm opinion that money could not be gathered without sinful activities and that it does not accompany the man at the time of his death.<sup>16</sup> Such collection of money, therefore, is painful. In its place, if the name of God is earned it can lead to salvation.

#### V

In Guru's days, the tendency of begging by *sanyasis* and hermits had increased so much that even the healthy people had started shirking hard work. Condemning such people, the Guru asked, "Are you not ashamed of begging from door to door?" The Guru has disapproved the habit of getting food from a number of houses. He does not consider those '*yogis*' fit for becoming 'Guru', who indulged in begging. These '*sanyasis*' lack spiritual knowledge. They wear glass-rings in their

ears only to fill their bellies. They are like a poor '*mullah*' who expects offerings at his own home as if it were a mosque in itself. The Guru has made it very clear that the so called Guru going out for begging deserves on respect. A true '*sanyasi*' earns not only his own livelihood but also is always prepared to help those in need.

The judiciary of Guru Nanak's contemporary society was almost in the hands of *Brahmans* and *Mullahs*. There was no punishment from the administration for social and religious sins. On the other hand, they were dealt with by *Brahmans* and *Qazis* who had grown proud and unjust as a result of these powers. That is the reason why Guru Nanak has reproached to them. Scolding the *Qazis*, he says: 'By playing upon rosary, repeating the name of God unwillingly and by passing '*farwas*' on the false grounds of Quran, no body would gain spirituality'. The sins of taking bribe cannot be washed away by reciting the Quran :

The *Qazi* sitteth in judgement upon others,  
And telleth the rosary and mutters the name of Allah.  
But he doeth injustice, for, his palm is greased,  
And if anyone asketh him, he quotes the Quran.

(S. Var Ramkali, p. 951)

He has regretted that the *Qazis* live on bribe and tell lies and the *Brahmans* who pretend to be pious after having a holy dip exploit the creatures of God :

The *Qazi* uttereth falsehood and so eateth dirt  
The *Brahmin* slayeth life and then bathes  
(at the pilgrimstations)

(2:5:7, Dhanasari, p. 662)

In Guru Nanak's view, a true *Qazi* is he who attains salvation while living in this world and a true *Brahman* is he who learns to meditate on God and ensures salvation not only for himself but also for his whole lineage :

He alone is a *Qazi* who turns his mind away (from Maya)  
And by the Guru's grace, dieth (to his self) even while alive,  
He alone is a *Brahman* who reflecteth on the *Brahma*  
And so saves himself and also all his kindreds.

(3:5:7, Dhanasari, p. 662)

A real judge should have full faith in God. In other words, only he

who is a real worshipper of God can show compassion to others. A selfish man cannot be a real judge :

He is the *Qazi* who hath abandoned his  
ego and hath the Name as his main stay.

(3:2:8, *Siri Ragu*, p. 24)

## VI

Guru Nanak, eradicating the affection of piety, showed the right path to people. The *Brahmans* had infected the common people with superstitions. People burnt wood after washing it lest some insect should be killed, but they never thought of the germs in the water they drank. They washed their body, but they never thought of the purity of their heart. The Guru taught that greed leads to impurity of mind and telling lies makes tongue profane; eyes get contaminated by looking maliciously at the money and the women of the others; ears are polluted by listening to backbiting. All these lead to transmigration of the soul.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Guru Nanak felt that physical purity is meaningless unless a man is pious at heart and he has devotion for God.

Pure are not they who bathe their bodies :

Pure, Nanak, are they in whose mind is He, The Lord.

(S. 2, *Var Asa*, p. 472)

Man, in order to lead a pious life, should follow the path of truth. He should give up all other delusions and attractions. He should meditate and repeat the True Name by his mind and tongue. Both, his action and word get pure in the process. The true living is higher than Truth itself. In other words Guru Nanak's message is for the integration of thought, word and deed through deep meditation, noble conduct and good intentions. It not only uplifts the society but also gives momentum to the values of life.

## VII

Guru Nanak has laid down a number of 'do's' and 'dont's' in order to make life virtuous. Man can become virtuous by following these 'do's' and 'dont's'. He had told us to learn good manners, to be merciful and charitable and to realize yourselves (*Slok 19, Var Asa*). Again, he has regarded politeness and sweet speech as the essence of all the virtues.

He believes that he who bows is virtuous, but performance of the rituals is not enough. He expects a regulated life also. The wearing of

the sacred thread is meaningful only if it is woven out of the cotton of compassion, thread of contentment, knots of asceticism and the twist of truth. Such a sacred thread never breaks or falls. Alongwith these precepts of life, Guru Nanak has also preached to reject some of the unwanted elements of life. First of all, he has condemned social exploitation. He has reproached those Muslim officers who never refrained from sucking the human blood :

If the blood sticks to the clothes,  
the clothes are rendered impure;  
Will the mind of those be pure  
who suck the blood of humans?

(S. *Var Majh*, p. 140)

Such blood suckers have been called man-eaters by the Guru. To usurp the right of somebody else is like eating beef for a Hindu and pork for a Muslim. Evil cannot be converted into virtue through rationalisation, exactly in the same way as the unsanctioned flesh cannot be converted into sanctioned one by putting too much of spices into it. Guru Nanak has prohibited bad conduct, sexual relation with a woman other than one's wife, backbiting, bribery, breach of trust, avarice, vanity, etc. He disapproved the policy of the Pundits who put long mark on their foreheads, but cheated the humanity like a wolf in the garb of a lamb. An educated man with ego and greed is an idiot, in his view.

Thus it can be concluded that Guru Nanak expected of his followers such a social life wherein they must be aware of their rights and obligations. They should lead a life of discipline, simplicity and good conduct. He has visualised such a casteless society. Guru Nanak saw corruption in his contemporary social and political life and he criticised it bitterly. In order to re-establish the social values, he has prescribed a virtuous Conduct. Guru Nanak was infact a protestant.

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4. S. 8-10, *Var Asa*.
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6. 3:1:6 *Dhanasari*, p. 663.
7. 7:1:8 *Basant*, p. 1191.
8. 1:2:4, *Dhanasari*, p. 661.
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11. S. 41, *Var Asa*, p. 473.
12. S. *Var Asa*, p. 474.
13. S. *Var Asa*, p. 470.
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16. 3:12, *Asa*, p. 417.
17. S. 28, *Var Asa*.

# GURU NANAK'S CONCEPTION OF AESTHETICS

*Gobind Singh Mansukhani*

Aesthetics as a branch of philosophy is concerned with the understanding of beauty and its manifestation in art and nature. Does beauty lie in the object or in subjective experience? Is not aesthetic experience likely to be influenced by the critic's predilections and politics? Does the interpretation of beauty involve an analysis of the processes of creation and appreciation? In the process of appreciation will the critic make value judgements? Such questions come within the field of aesthetics.

The contemporary Indian critic is a heir to two traditions—Indian and Western. Indian aesthetics is largely based on Sanskrit poetics. Western aesthetics derives its substance from Greek, Italian and English theorists. Both have different criteria of appreciation of beauty. As such it is difficult to arrive at a value judgement of Indian poetry. Moreover, norms differ from region to region and this depends on the development and maturity of various regional literatures. With this caveat, one may now proceed to a consideration of the conception of aesthetic of a great Punjabi poet like Guru Nanak.

Indian aesthetics is based on the Sanskrit theory of *Vastu* (matter or form), *Alankara* (embellishment) and *Rasa*<sup>1</sup> (pleasure). *Rasa* literally means juice or flavour. By passing the actual, great poetry transcends the limitations of time and place and presents the quintessence of life. *Dhuni* is another element which by its suggestiveness discovers beauty behind reality. The *Rasa-Dhuni* theory is based on the concepts of classical aestheticians like Bharata, Bhatta Nayaka, Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta. Besides this, *Alanakars* (figures of speech), *Gunas* (poetic qualities) and *Riti* (style) contribute to the appeal of poetry. *Alankars* are embellishments, as important to poetry as ornaments to a lady.<sup>2</sup> The *Gunas* are *Madhurya* (sweetness), *Prasada* (clearness) and



*Ojas* (forcefulness). Aesthetic enjoyment may in certain cases lead to a deeper joy or exaltation comparable to an invocation or prayer.

Western aesthetics is largely based on the theories of Greek and Roman philosophers. Plato was suspicious of the charms of poetry. Aristotle regarded *Katharsis*—purgation or purification of emotions—as the source of joy. Longinus however regarded poetry as an elevation, an ecstasy, an entrance like the flash of lightning.<sup>3</sup> It transports us to a new and sublime world. Longinus is the nearest to the Indian view of great poetry. Ruskin's view of fine art is that it expresses the religious sentiments of men, perfects their ethical state and does them material service.<sup>4</sup> This view comes very near the view of Guru Nanak on the goal of great poetry.

A great poet sees the Reality behind the Appearance with his imagination or sensibility, while the reader repeats the experience and gains the joy or feeling of the poet himself. If the poet is the creator, the lover of poetry too is a creator, because he recreates what the poet originally experienced in himself. The joy of poetry is therefore akin to the joy in the appreciation and fulfilment of beauty.

#### RASA

If one were to apply the classical theory of *Rasa* to Guru Nanak's poetry, one could find all the nine types of *Rasa* in his work. There are passages of *Shingar Rasa*, as for instance:

Beauteous are Thy eyes, sparkling Thy teeth,  
Graceful is Thy gait, O Lord!  
Sweet Thy speech like a *Koel's*,  
Alluring is Thy Youth.<sup>5</sup>

*Bir Rasa* is evident in the poems which depict the world as an arena of battle where the individual soul is in conflict with evil passions and temptations. *Has Rasa* and *Bibhatsa Rasa* also flow out from same compositions. *Karun Rasa* is present in Babar-vani:

Terrible has been the slaughter,  
Loud have been the cries of innocent victims,  
Did not this awaken pity in Thee, O Almighty.<sup>6</sup>

*Bhayanak Rasa* and *Adibhut Rasa* are present in certain compositions. *Rudra Rasa* is evident in lines like these:

When it is Thy will, men wield the sword  
And sever the head from the neck.<sup>7</sup>

*Shant Rasa* flows out of hymns which deal with the equipoise which comes from meditation on the *Name*.

Guru Nanak's contribution to *Rasa* was the *Nam Rasa* or *Amrit Rasa*. He called it by various names such as *Maha Rasa*, *Sar Rasa*, *Sant Rasa*, *Har Rasa*, *Amto Rasa*. He distinguished it from the pleasures of the five senses. It is entirely different from *Kama Rasa* or *Indri-ka-Rasa*. *Nam Rasa* is neither thrill nor sensibility. It is the feeling of joy or rather bliss caused by the God's word in comparison to which every earthly *Rasa* appears insipid and tasteless:

"Whatever *Rasa* other than the true *Rasa* I have experienced appears to me to be tasteless and unsavoury; I have tasted the *Amrit Rasa* in the Guru's company. It is sweeter than the juice of the sugarcane."<sup>8</sup>

He knows that ordinary people like the other types of *Raja* such as :

The pleasures of gold, of sliver, of sex,  
The joy of perfume, of riding, of mansions,  
The relish of sweets and of meats  
With so many pleasures, how can one relish  
The Name of God?<sup>9</sup>

Knowing the value and the relish of *Nam Rasa*, Guru Nanak exhorted the people to drink it.

Without being imbued with the *Nam-Nectar*,  
Salvation cannot be obtained.<sup>10</sup>

Guru Nanak dwells on the efficacy of *Nam-Rasa* and its value in the path of divinity, He says;

If one drinks God's elixir and is wrapt in trance  
In his own house, it is then that he obtains peace.  
By the Guru's grace, he understands his Lord.  
His mind wanders not and he restraints its movements.<sup>11</sup>

*Nam Rasa* not only quenches the thirst of the soul, but also of the body;

Nanak, sweet is the great elixir of the Lord's Name  
I quaff it day and night, with my body and soul.<sup>12</sup>

*Nam Rasa* stills the human desires and brings bliss. It can be obtained through the perfect Guru.

Guru Nanak has given a beautiful concept of the spiritual dance where all the faculties are utilised to ensure divine joy. He says :

Deem the praise of the Lord as thy beating time,  
 Other dances produce sensuous pleasure in the mind.  
 Play truth and contentment as thine pair of cymbals;  
 Make the perpetual vision of the Lord thy ankle-bells,  
 Let the stilling of duality be thy music and song.  
 In such an affection, dance thou by beating time with thy feet. <sup>13</sup>

### THE BARD

The high status given to the bard by the Greeks was due to the fact that the poet was a maker, a creator of beauty and goodness. Even Plato who condemned art, regarded music as "the means of realising the Supreme power."<sup>14</sup> Music has the potentiality to inspire man to a spiritual experience and spiritual discovery. The poet is the seer. He has in him what Sri Aurobindo calls the five suns of poetry—Truth, Beauty, Delight (*Ananda*), Life and Spirit. He ensures the mediation between the truth of the spirit and the truth of life. He interprets to man "his present and reinterprets his past and can point him to his future, and in all the three reveal to him the force of the Eternal."<sup>15</sup>

A similar concept of the divine inspiration of the poet is given by Guru Nanak. The bard is a messenger of God who interprets his encounter with Divinity. He says :

I am a minstrel picked out  
 Of a state of inertia, put on the mission,  
 Instructed in Divine Ordainment,  
 To disseminate the Gospel and be it day or night,  
 The minstrel disseminates the Divine Revelation  
 Through the ambrosial song;  
 Nanak says that through imbibing the praise of Truth,  
 The Truthful has been attained.<sup>16</sup>

It is as if God is speaking through the lips of the poet. This sublime poetry reveals the secrets of the self and God-head. The poet is like a river of inspiration arising out of the ethereal heights, arising out of a state of grace to irrigate and fertilise the millions of beings that lie in its course.

Guru Nanak's *Bani* is meant to be sung according to classical Indian *Ragas*. Music has the power to invoke the yearning for divinity. The latent thirst for beauty can only be satisfied when one attunes one's mind to the *Holy Name*. Guru Nanak says :

The divine music of God's flute resounds  
Through His word, spontaneously and continuously in every  
heart.<sup>17</sup>

The *Sikh* Gurus called devotional singing *Kirtan* and prized it as a priceless gem. Guru Arjan says :

*Kirtan* is an invaluable gem ;  
It is an ocean of bliss and virtues.<sup>18</sup>

When the mind of the devotee dwells on the meaning of a devotional poem, it is transported to a world of joy. Such *Surat-Shabad* collaboration stirs the soul and produces a feeling of *Sahaj* or equipoise. Guru Nanak says :

By linking the *Shabad* with consciousness  
One can get in tune with God  
And obtain the sublime joy.<sup>19</sup>

Those who are intoxicated with the *Rasa* of *Shabad* merge in the Lord's True Name.<sup>20</sup> The celestial music entrances the soul when the consciousness is merged in the *Shabad*.<sup>21</sup>

### DHUNI

One of the poetic devices according to Indian aesthetics is *Dhuni*. The words are so employed that they possess a hidden meaning. This allusive and suggestive mode of utterance is particularly suited to religious poetry where the inner meaning is more important than the outer meaning. For example, Guru Nanak says : "All are the wives of the spouse and all make decorations for Him. Evil is the red robe of those who instead of praying for His mercy have come to reckon accounts with their spouse. Through hypocrisy, His love is not obtained. The counterfeit gilding is ruinous."<sup>22</sup> The reference is to the seekers of divinity who aspire for salvation. Some of them are involved in ritual and ostentatious altruism—the counterfeit gilding—which pleases not the Lord. Such souls cannot win the love of God.

Just as the music of the echo is more pleasing and resonant than the original piece, in the same way the suggestion is more significant than the textual connotation. Guru Nanak describes the fascination of the Lord in terms of the perfection of human beauty :

Thou art the Lord who hast the graceful nose and long hair  
Cast in gold, Thy body is valuable,

Cast in gold is His body with a rosary like that of Krishna  
Meditate on Him, O my friends.<sup>23</sup>

The Lord is beyond form, colour and contour, but through the imagery of bodily perfection, Guru Nanak presents him as a wholly fascinating and enchanting person. The Guru's conviction is that He is the acme of human beauty.

Guru Nanak's conception of beauty is entirely his own. He does not regard that as beautiful which is distinctively useful or comfortable. The beautiful tends to be morally good and is in keeping with noble thought, ethical and altruistic action. Guru Nanak speaks of the beautiful bride :

She is comely, beauteous, intelligent and wise,  
Who is intoxicated with glee and day and night absorbed in  
the love of the Lord.<sup>24</sup>

All characteristics of beauty emanate from God. He is the embodiment of Beauty and Truth :

Blessed art Thou, the Creator, the Rapture,  
The primal Truth and Beauty and longing Eternal.<sup>25</sup>

### *SUPER AESTHETICS*

Guru Nanak's poetry is the poetry of transformation. Man is divine in origin but his self is covered with *Maya*. The real man is in God's own image. Guru Nanak says :

Oh man, you are of divine origin,  
Recognise yourself.

He wants to transform human beings into super-men. He builds the rainbow-bridge between earth and heaven. It is the ascent of the self from the transient to the permanent, from the worldly man to the God-man. In the pilgrim's way lie trails, temptations, ordeals and traps. There is the churning of the inner ocean of consciousness to uplift the mind to a realisation of the diviner possibilities for the individual.

According to higher aesthetics, the beauty of form is just one aspect of the value of poetry. Art is not only a technique of form or expression of beauty; It is "a self-expression of consciousness under the conditions of aesthetic vision and a perfect execution. There are not only aesthetic values, but also life values, mind-values and soul-values that enter into art. The things that go into the making of great

poetry are the perfection of expressive form, discovery of beauty, revelation of the soul and the essence of things and the power of creative consciousness, and *Anāndā* of which they are the vehicles."<sup>26</sup> Guru Nanak's *Bani* is an example of higher aesthetics. He regards it as the highest music and *Veda* which bring the soul in union with the Lord of the universe.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere Guru Nanak affirms that the pure one meditates on the Guru's words. Through it, he abides in his own home.<sup>28</sup>

Guru Nanak's conception of aesthetics extends to group-singing or community-choir. When a group of persons join in *kirtan*, the whole atmosphere is so charged with spiritual fervour that the participants lose their sense of identity and share the joy of being in tune with the Infinite. Guru Nanak encourages congregational singing of *kirtan* so that the stirrings of the soul reach a high ecstasy and partake in the joy of supplication to the Almighty in the form of a representative deputation. Guru Nanak says :

In the company of the saints and the assembly of the holy God  
showers His grace which bestows bliss.<sup>29</sup>

Elsewhere Guru Nanak eulogies the *Nam Rasa* available in the company of the evolved souls :

You will obtain *Hari Rasa* in the sacred congregation  
The fear of death will vanish on meeting the Guru.<sup>30</sup>

Guru Nanak liberalised the concept of aesthetics so as to cover the realm of higher or super-aesthetics where poetry took the form of *Montra*-the Word or *Logos* or the message of God as it came to him. The Divine word has the power of producing an echo in a gifted soul :

Divine Music is heard in every soul.  
Reverberant, continuous, self-sustained, a revelation;  
Few are the saints who are granted the understanding Nanak,  
release from bondage comes from contemplating the word.  
Forget not the holy Name.<sup>31</sup>

This *Mantra* poetry contains both the world-vision and the soul-vision. The intensities of poetic words, of rhythmic movement and of soul's vision merge to illumine the eternal spirit of Beauty and Truth. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, this spiritually-tinged poetry becomes "a larger cosmic vision, a realising of the God-head in the world and in man, of his divine possibilities as well of the greatness of the power that manifests in what he is, a spiritualised uplifting of his thought and

feeling and sense and action, a more developed psychic mind and heart, a truer and a deeper insight into his nature and the meaning of the world, a calling of divine potentialities and more spiritual values into the intention and structure of his life, that is the call upon humanity, the prospect offered to it by the slowly unfolding and now more clearly disclosed self of the universe."<sup>32</sup>

Guru Nanak extended the bounds of poetry so as to blend prophetic vision with classical or folk music. He is not only the poet's poet, but also the universal singer. The prophet announces the Truth as the word of God; the poet shows Truth in its power of beauty; the singer shows Truth in its power of ecstasy. He is therefore a trinity; prophet, poet and musician—*Guru, Shair and Dhadhi*.<sup>33</sup>

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